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LECTURES & ESSAYS

(THEOLOGICAL)

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NABABIDHAN TRUST
CALCUTTA

1954

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THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION IN MODERN INDIA*

To a representative from India an International Conference of liberal religious thinkers and workers has a unique significance. It is a gathering together of those who have felt and welcomed the first impulse of the awakening of the new age, and to whom the freedom of the spirit which has been its inheritance has meant not simply the death of the old, but the dawn of a new life. Let it be said no more that liberal religion is only another name for dry, destructive rationalism, empty and barren in itself, which is scarcely to be preferred to the old traditionalism and dogmatism which it claims to have superseded ; but that it is the actual finding of God under the new conditions of the age we have to live in. The revelation of modern thought is indeed a glorious apocalypse leading one into the unsearchable, inexhaustible depths of the spiritual consciousness of humanity where man is felt more than ever to be a child of the Eternal. Shall we not say that the faith arising out of this consciousness, wherever the pure, genuine one is attained, is stronger, more enduring, more fruitful than any faith in mere book, or tradition, or church dogma, because deeper rooted in the eternal truth of things ? Neither science nor the

*A paper read at the International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers, at Geneva August 31st, 1905.

evolution of history shall be a stumbling-block in the path of this faith, for it has insight to look deeper than the surface and patience to wait till each has delivered its true message and revelation. This faith shall lead on to duty, to love, to reverence—reverence with a clear-sifting insight added, for the past as well as for all times, for men and for systems—love that shall break down all barriers of caste and creed, of race and colour—and duty that shall seek the realisation of this love at all costs, in life, and, if need be, through death.

It is wonderful to contemplate how this faith has dawned and slowly brightened upon us till it has brought us to where we are at present. Shall we say that here also the light dawned first upon the East, and thence travelled to the West ; or that it was carried from the West to the East ; or that its rays broke forth simultaneously in the Eastern and Western horizon till they met and mingled with each other ? The names of Channing, Emerson, and Theodore Parker ; of Carlyle, Max Muller, and Martineau ; of Raja Rammohan Roy, Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen, occur to one, with other minor names, as the peaks that caught up this light and left it as an inheritance to their generation. But here in the kindling of all these souls we recognise a direct touch of the Divine, a throbbing and upheaving of the World-Spirit for this age of ours. How was all this brought about ? Was it simply the outcome of the strain and tension that modern science and modern civilisation laid upon the native, never-dying instincts of reverence and love ingrained in the heart of humanity ; or was it the con-

centrated breathing forth of the highest aspirations which all the tendencies of the age in education, politics, commerce, and social development had called forth? It is useless to speculate. The workings of the Spirit are mysterious, and we in India simply recognise therein the hand of Providence, and call it the New Light, the Dispensation of God for this age of ours.

It is not necessary, I believe, nor would it be quite profitable perhaps, to enter upon a detailed analysis of this faith. It is better described as a living inspiration within the soul than as something capable of a precise logical definition. Still, I believe, in a rough sort of way, three points stand out clearly as its marked characteristics.

In the first place, it realises that the whole universe—the whole world of matter as well as the whole world of mind—rests ultimately upon a foundation of the Spirit—and that Spirit is the infinite God.

In the second place, man is a spirit; and the test of his life, of his achievements, as well as his joys and sorrows, must, in the last resort, be a 'spiritual' test; and he has a spiritual destiny, which, not simply from the 'extensive' point of view in respect of time, but still more from the 'intensive' point of view, is best described as 'eternal'.

In the third place, all mankind are bound up in a common life in the Spirit, whereof also the ultimate test is a spiritual one, and which also has an eternal spiritual destiny.

It is the working out of this faith in its manifold application to all the details of individual, national,

and cosmopolitan life that is the religious problem of the present age. The conditions of the problem in the East and in the West, on in each separate country and nationality, must be different in detail, while being in the essence similar. I can but here attempt to set forth in a rough sort of way some of the conditions under which the problem has to be worked out in India.

Here the very first thing that confronts us is what might be called the extreme tendency towards secularism that meets us everywhere. Modern civilisation has, in general, been charged with materialism, and I believe it must be admitted that the charge is so far true as materialism is taken to mean setting too much store upon what a man or a nation *has* rather than upon what a man or a nation *is*. What, however, I mean by the tendency towards secularism in India has a special aspect of its own. It is due to the fact that the Government in India, being a foreign Government, is bound, and rightly bound, to adopt what is known as a policy of religious neutrality. From a purely Western point of view this might seem to be an unmixed advantage, since the principle of the separation between the Church and the State is being more and more appreciated, and more and more widely acted upon in the West. But in a country like India, where no institution can thrive without Government support or patronage, direct or indirect, the adoption of this principle, while admitted to be a political and moral necessity, has consequences that are enormously far-reaching. One effect, for instance, is the complete secularisation of the whole educational system of the

country, from the highest to the lowest. Just consider what must be the condition of a people and society in which, from the lowest primary school to the highest university, there is no regular provision for imparting any distinct, definite religious instruction. There is certainly a great deal of superstition in India, as there is, perhaps, in every country in the world, and, thanks to English education, all this is being dispersed ; but what we have in its place is not a knowledge of the deeper truth of life, not a real insight into human nature and an acquaintance with the feelings of reverence, admiration, and true humility, but only what is calculated to enable a man to fill a little place in the great wheel of the State if he is wanted, with, perhaps, in the case of the select few, a little of science and literature added, without any proper guidance as to what use to make of them. It is against this sheer blank in respect of religious ideas and sentiments, deliberately fostered, entertained, and developed from childhood upwards, that the faith of liberal religion in India has to assert and establish itself. The temperament of the Indian mind is essentially religious and the cultivation of some of the traditional forms of religious worship and culture has not altogether gone out, but, with every successive generation, these things are more and more receding into the past, and at the present day we have to face the fact that the fight of liberal faith is not with superstition, but with indifferentism, callousness of heart, and secularism.

In the next place, we cannot forget that liberal religion cannot realise itself as a living faith in the

national consciousness if it does not find the basis both for its speculative theology and practical spiritual culture in the faith and culture that have moulded the life and spirit of the people for generations past. And in this respect India occupies a unique position. India claims the Upanishads, the Vedanta philosophy, and the ethics of the Bhagavadgita as her own. The Rigveda hymns were composed and sung on her soil. Out of her people arose Buddha and Sankaracharya. Vaishnavism and Sikhism belong to her, while Muhammadanism, though coming from a distant soil, has had a long and striking history within India. The spirit and influence of all these faiths and cults, personalities and systems, have mingled indissolubly with the life and institutions of the people, with whatever is noblest and best in them, and to lose sight of them, or ignore them, or be indifferent to them, would mean a most reckless and deplorable impoverishment of the national life and spirit which could possibly have no rational or moral justification. Here the function of liberal religion in India is practically the same as it has been in the West with reference to the whole domain of the Christian literature and culture of the past. The only question is, what is the method to be applied in dealing with the past, in each case? Here I might be allowed just to make one observation. One of the objects of the method, undoubtedly, is a thoroughly critical study of the past—so as to secure accuracy in things historical as far as possible—and a perfectly ‘rational’ estimate of all beliefs, notions, laws, disciplines, institutions, practices, or whatever else it might be, that had at one time or another the sanc-

tion of religion. Be it the account of the life of Buddha or that of Jesus; be it the institution of monasticism in Europe or the caste system of India—everything shall have to pass through this test. But I believe there is another and a higher object still. It is to grasp, appreciate, assimilate, preserve, and perpetuate, in all its realistic depth and intensity, all that wealth of genuine spiritual life and experience which, under the necessary drawbacks of human speech and expression, lies stored up in these records of the past. Woe unto us if we forget or miss the latter, and trouble ourselves too much about the former alone !

Liberal religion in India, however, has not only to study, appreciate, and assimilate a past that is unusually rich and variegated, but it has to deal with a present that is extremely complicated. In respect of the simplicity and integrity in the development of social life and institutions there can be no comparison between India and Western countries. If we consider only the number of languages through which it will have to express and establish itself before it can be considered to have become the national faith of India, we shall have some idea of the vastness of the work lying before it. The last " Census Report " for India, published by the Government in 1903, gives a list of 180 languages as spoken in different parts of India, and with regard to this most interesting aspect of the question I shall simply quote the following passage from the same " Report " :—

" Light comes from the East, but many years must yet be passed in unremitting quest of knowledge before we can inevitably distinguish it from that false dawn

which is but a promise and not the reality. Hitherto scholars have busied themselves with the tongues and thoughts of ancient India, and have too often presented them as illustrating the India of the present day. But the true India will never be known till the light of the West has been thrown on the hopes, the fears, the beliefs, of the two hundred and ninety-four millions who have been counted at the present census. For this, an accurate knowledge of the vernaculars is necessary, a knowledge not only of the colloquial languages, but also, where they exist, of the literatures too commonly decried as worthless, but which one who has studied them and loved them can confidently affirm to be no mean possession of no mean land " (p. 342).

If the position of India in respect of the religious problem is unique from so many different points of view, shall I not be justified in saying that it is still more unique in this, that it is on the soil of India, as nowhere else in the world, that the East and the West have shaken hands with each other ? It is a real contact of life with life, spirit with spirit, literature with literature, religion with religion ; though it is far from being a mingling together of social life, or manners and ideals. To what permanent benefit, in the deeper spiritual sense of the term, this contact can lead so far as the West is concerned, it is not for us to say. There are many in the West, I suppose, to whom it is a pleasure to respond to Rudyard Kipling's sentiment—

" The East is East, and the West is West,
And never the twain can meet,"

just as there are many, I know, in our part of the world who believe that it would be a curse, and not a

blessing, if the influence of the spirit of the West were to reach deeper than our industry and commerce and politics, and affect the inner life of the people. I am not at liberty at this place to enter upon a discussion of the momentous issues involved in these questions. As regards the West, I shall simply ask, Is there nothing in the high contemplative ideal, the God-absorption and communion of ancient Hinduism, the dignified self-mastery, and perfect self-abandonment to a world-embracing love of Buddha Sakyamuni, the selfless love-inspired heroism of the Bhagabadgita, and the passionate intoxication of divine love of modern Vaishnavism, which, if properly appreciated and assimilated, might give to the spirit of the West a fullness, a sweetness, a beauty, and a grace which it would otherwise lack? And, as regards the East, I shall only express our most earnest conviction that for the perfection of its own inner spiritual development, it cannot do without the spirit of the West, so far as that spirit has been shaped and developed under the leading of the Cross. Sorrow has been looked upon as a pure evil from the point of view of the Vedanta as well as Buddhism, to be shunned, and to be shaken off even at the cost of extinction of individual consciousness. Sorrow as gift of God, chastening, strengthening, sweetening human life, not certainly to be sought after, but to be accepted and borne and carried through life in the form in which it comes from the hand of Providence, is symbolised in the cross which comes as a gift from Heaven to the East through the West. Further, the law of 'Karma' has found acceptance in the East too much in a cosmic, impersonal sense; it

must find a new meaning in the light of the West in the sense of a stern personal responsibility and obligation, if the East is to be saved from fatalism, caste, stagnation, and death. Liberal religion in India, therefore, looks up with the most earnest yearning to Christ—not the Christ of dogma, but the living Christ as he is in the Christian consciousness of the West. It is this living contact with the living Christ that is necessary for our salvation. Most earnestly do we seek after a true knowledge of the life and religion of Jesus, the history and literature of Christendom, but above all we do want a living touch with the Spirit of Jesus as he is in the depths of one's own spiritual consciousness, and as he still walks about in the world, loving, teaching, blessing, and saving fallen humanity.

This, then, is where we stand, confronted with an ever-growing secularism which is fostered by the very system of education deliberately adopted for the whole country from one end to the other ; with the obligation resting upon us of carefully sifting out and preserving the inestimable spiritual treasure which is our inheritance from the past, while changing, reforming, or getting rid of the beliefs, customs, and institutions that cannot stand the light of a searching rational criticism ; giving perfectly free scope to each section of the two hundred and ninety-four millions of our population to develop along the lines that are most natural to itself while creating for all the common consciousness of a national religious life ; learning from the West its spirit of sturdy manhood and its stern sense of individual responsibility, and accepting from Jesus his sweet, life-giving gospel of the Cross.

With this most heavy and serious work lying before us, we are just now passing through a most trying period. We have just lost two of our leaders—Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, who passed away at the venerable old age of ninety—the man who had taken up the torch from the hands of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and passed it on to Keshub Chunder Sen, and whose very presence was a source of inspiration and of unspeakable strength to our movement ; and Rev. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, whose labours in Europe and America had done so much to draw us closer to our fellow-believers in the West. Our organisation is not particularly strong, our workers and labourers are not many, and, considering that the main work before us is a work of education—that of educating two hundred and ninety-four millions of people into the gospel of the New Faith—our institutions are miserably poor and insignificant. But the spirit of the times, yea, the Spirit of God is with us ; and the subtle powers of this faith must have already penetrated into many a soul all over the country, from Calcutta to Bombay, from Madras to Lahore, whose name yet does not appear on the list of the members of our Church ; and there must be many a silent force, known or unknown to us, in all quarters, working in the direction of the same end that we are striving to realise. And over and above all this, as a blessing from on High, there comes the fellowship of the faithful, the learned, the devout in the many lands of the West, whom we, unworthy as we are, have the privilege of calling our brothers in faith, and by whose generous courtesy and kindness it is that I have the privilege of being here and speaking

as the representative of my beloved Fatherland. May, under the direction and blessing of Providence, the East and West, Asia and Europe and America, help one another in the fulfilment of that mission which He has appointed and set apart for each.

*POSITION OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ
IN RELATION TO THE
World's Modern Religious Development

The invitation to speak to you about my impressions of the Great International Conference of Liberal Religions at Geneva to which you did me the honour of sending me as your representative, comes as a welcome call, and I respond to it most heartily. It is just a year since that Conference met. It had its sittings during the last four days of August, 1905, in the large and beautiful University hall of Geneva. Some of the services were held in the beautiful Cathedral where at one time John Calvin, used to preach, and when listening to a Unitarian minister preaching from the pulpit of John Calvin, people thought of the days when Calvin had burnt Servetus, the Genevan Unitarian of his time, and reflected upon the wonderful change that time has brought about in the spirit of religion in the West. One day a pilgrimage was made to the tomb of Servetus, and fitting speeches made on the spot, and the same evening there were enthusiastic addresses on the receipt of a telegraphic intelligence of the Peace between Japan and Russia ; and congratulatory messages sent to the Mikado and the Czar. But it is not on these or other personal memories that crowd into the mind when I

*A paper read at a special public meeting convened by the Brahmo Somaj Committee.

think of the Conference that I desire to dilate, but I shall speak of those other aspects, and those deeper and more general questions that are suggested by the wider name that I have chosen to give to my subject.

And first, as regards the significance of the Conference. Geneva, the beloved of the Swiss, the city of the brave and the free,—Geneva, the picturesque, fronting the snow-clad peak of Mont Blanc, and quietly looking down upon the waters of the Rhone emerging out of Lake Lemman,—Geneva has been the chosen seat of many an International Conference,—Arbitration Courts, and Peace Conferences, and such like,—which History duly records; but none, I believe, with a deeper significance than this International Conference of Liberal Religions, which also, I have no doubt, will find its due place in History. This conference is held once in two years, and this was the third. There were representatives in it from Germany, Austria, England, Belgium, United States, France, Holland, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, Morocco, and Switzerland. It was not simply a Parliament of Religions based merely on the principle of mutual toleration, but it was a Conference of men from different nationalities and even different denominations, fraternizing with one another in a spirit of the deepest moral and spiritual sympathy. It was not simply a Conference of Unitarians,—because there were many distinguished men in it, who could not care much for the Unitarian name,—men occupying the very highest place amongst living European thinkers,—men like Dr. Pfleiderer of Berlin, and Albert Reville of Paris, and Professor Montet of Geneva, and Professor Hugenholtz of

Amsterdam, and Dr. Harnack of Berlin, than whom, I believe, there is no higher living authority on the History of the Christian church and dogma, who, however, was prevented by illness from actually attending the Conference.

What, however, is it that holds these men together? What is their Belief? What is their Religion? Let me answer this question in the words of the following extract taken from the inaugural address of the Honorary President of the Conference,—Professor Chantre, of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Geneva.

“Our aim is to be the representatives of sincerity; our professional duty is, from my point of view, to remain as such representatives in the Church, for this is the only way by which the Church in this 20th century can be the ground and pillar of truth.

“The days of equivocations, of creeds artistically constructed to mask their fissures, of old articles of belief which people repeat without believing in them, those days, I say, are passed. To-day a man can only be a faithful worker in the kingdom of God as he is, an Israelite without guile, a man of absolute sincerity.”

“O God,” prayed a modern theologian, “give me the truth, that I may be light through and through; give me sincerity, that the truth I know, I may manifest without dissimulation or reserve.”

This is a broad enough principle of religious sympathy and religious co-operation;—a little too broad perhaps, some would say: For if you take sincerity as the only test of a religious brotherhood

what is there to prevent the most orthodox Christian and the most orthodox Hindu to combine not only with the Unitarian and the Brahmo, but with the most radical free-thinker, and agnostic and atheist into such a brotherhood ? What then would be the distinction between religion and no-religion ? By way of partial answer to this, let me quote the following passage from the presidential address of Prof. Montet, Dean of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Geneva :

“Before declaring the Congress open, I desire solemnly to affirm that we are believers. It is because we have a profound faith in the truth of the cause of religion, that we defend it, and that we have worked with such zeal in preparing for this Congress..... We shall work with joy and enthusiasm for we can take up in all sincerity the words of the Apostle and say, ‘I believe, therefore have I spoken.’ ”

Sincerity combined with Faith—that seems to be the conception of the Light that these western thinkers speak of. But faith in what ? Shall we say,—in some divine revelation in the heart ? And shall we add,—when this revelation is understood, felt, realised, and then believed in,—then only the faith is sincere ;—and when it is only a matter of hearsay, lip-deep profession, or imposture upon others, then the so-called faith is insincere, and it is not light but darkness ?

For we cannot forget that religion has its foundation upon certain ineradicable facts of life ;—it can not die so long as those facts remain ; it has a meaning only so far as it throws any light on those facts, en-

ables us to look into them, to adjust our souls to them ; and it ceases to have any meaning, nay, becomes an agent of evil, the moment that light goes out. Sin is a reality of life, so also is Sorrow ; Love and Holiness are realities, so also are death, and life itself and the hope of eternal life. The soul of man is always struggling towards some clear conviction, some honest faith about these realities that it can rest upon. Your science cannot drown them, nor your politics, nor economics, nor industries and activities whatever shape you might give them. On the contrary, your science and your politics, your economics and your industries have to marshal themselves under the selecting and disposing force of these deeper, more fundamental, ultimate realities of life. If that which you call your faith or religion helps you to understand these realities, to put yourself in the right sort of relation to them, it is all right, and what matter it what the people in Mars might say about your faith ; but if it does not so help you, what matters it what articles of faith you subscribe to, or what ceremonies you may punctiliously perform ?

This is the ground, as I understand it, of religious communion and co-operation between different denominations and nationalities, upon which the Geneva Conference met. It is not the same, as I have already hinted, as that of what might be called a mere parliament of religions. It is not simply the principle of a passive toleration,—or even the catholic recognition of the place of each traditional religion as a special dispensation of Providence, in its own fit time and conditions, in the historical evolution of Religion.

But it is a principle that is concerned intensely with the *present, actual* religious condition of a man or of a community. What is the faith possible to you and to me, to one born even now in Hindu society or in Christian society ; what is the faith that you and I can and do really call our own, always on the basis of a perfect intellectual sincerity and spiritual freedom ? Buddhism might be the most fitting dispensation of Providence for some centuries just before and after the commencement of the Christian era ; but how much of it, and in what shape, it is possible now, or does exist, as a living faith,—first, in a professed Buddhist next, in you and me ? The application of this test of a living, discriminative appreciation and assimilation to all forms of faith and religious culture, in a spirit of perfect open-heartedness and sincerity, is the one central principle upon which rested the foundation of the International Conference at Geneva.

It would be hopeless to expect uniformity of belief or practice on a principle like this ; but it secures sincerity of conviction, reality of faith, freedom of intellectual life,—harmony of mind and soul. It also debars all exclusiveness of spirit. I do not know that any distinguished Christian thinker of the orthodox Trinitarian faith had any connection with the Conference, or if any orthodox Hindu from India would care to join it ; but I have not the least doubt that if any one, accepting what I have described as the central principle of the conference, wanted to set forth his sincere convictions before it, the conference would give him a hearty welcome, whatever his particular beliefs and opinions might be.

The development of religious thought in the West in this direction is leading to some very striking results, not only in the shape of progressive movements amongst bodies like the Unitarians who are outside the Church ; but also in the shape of remarkable transformations of belief within the folds of the church itself. It will not be possible for me to give many illustrations of this new spirit within the limits of this short paper. But to us in the East it would be a most profitable and instructive study to follow workings of this spirit, which has at present, I might say, mainly a threefold application, viz.,—(1) to problems of pure speculative theology or practical religion including education, (2) to what are known as Bible problems, and (3) to Church problems. I might, however, make one small reference to a book called "The Atonement in modern Religious Thought" published in 1902, and consisting of a series of papers originally contributed to the Christian World of London in 1899-1900. One need not be a Christian thoroughly to enter into the spirit, and derive immense spiritual benefit, from a study of this essentially new treatment of the very corner-stone of Christian dogmatics, the cardinal doctrine of Atonement or Redemption, by men to whom orthodox and heterodox alike would listen with reverence, men such as—Professor Harnack of Berlin, Auguste Sabatier of Paris, Deans Fremantle and Farrar of England, and Rev. Lyman Abott, the successor of Henry Ward Beecher in the United States.

Let me give another illustration. Here is a passage from a thesis submitted to the Geneva Conference, by M. Louis Germain Levi, a Jewish Rabbi

at Dijon, who called his thesis an "Attempt at a methodical deduction of the fundamental principles of Judaism." A perusal of the thesis leaves one wondering how the modern spirit could make Judaism approach so near to Vedantism !

This is how he "deduces" the existence of "*an eternally living principle of order, beauty and love,*" which is his way of translating the "Yahveh" of Jewish scriptures !

"As like can only be produced by like, and the greater cannot proceed from the lesser, spirit can only proceed from spirit. Consequently the Spirit has eternally existed, for supposing that at a certain moment it had not, then, it never could have existed. The eternal Spirit that informs all things, we name **God.**"

Then he proceeds :

"In so far as I am myself Spirit, I am eternal. The special *form* of spirit I represent is alone ephemeral. Death is but the passage from one modality of the Spirit to another. As nothing is lost, no more in the moral than in the natural world, every effort passes into the living substance of the soul, thereby even contributing to decide the form its future destiny will assume."

Hence the eminent dignity of the human soul—inherent in it—and its destiny beyond this life.

"Spirit is eternally productive energy and being free it manifests itself in infinitely varied forms. It finds its most intense and brilliant expression in great geniuses. It revealed itself in a marked degree and in a special manner in the Hebrew Prophets.

"Hence the peculiar value of the Bible, and the originality of the vocation of Israel.

"Spirit, in its evolution in the midst of the world, submits to the conditions of time, space and individualisation, that is to say, it receives the impress of epochs, environment, and degrees of mental culture. The form then in which it invests itself is relative and should modify itself under new conditions, and in the degree in which the Spirit comes to clearer consciousness of itself. Hence, on one side, the necessity of formulas, rites and institutions in which the Spirit may incarnate itself and by which we may express it, in order the better to communicate with it, and with our fellows ; and on the other side, these formulas, rites and institutions being but means of expression—the necessity that they should be left open to revision and recasting when they are found to be narrow and inadequate.

"Hence the demand for Religious Worship and the necessity of constantly bringing this into harmony with aspirations and needs that are ever evolving."

All this is very interesting—Orthodox Christendom is marching, Judaism is marching too,—towards the acceptance of a certain spirit, which is the spirit of freedom and sincerity,—and when they have grown fully into that spirit, they will find that they are in essence one, however divergent may be the forms of worship and the institutions of each. This is a fact of great significance,—to us in the Brahmo Somaj,—nay, shall I not say, to us all in India,—in the East ? Did not the Brahmo Somaj start in the same spirit,—with the same principle ? Nay more, did not the

Brahmo Somaj show the way in certain respects, even to the great nations of the West, as regards the method of studying scriptures, of discarding sectarianism and recognizing in each historic dispensation a continuous evolution of the purpose of Providence ? When in an address to the Unitarian Club at Toronto I referred to the influence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy upon Mr. Adams who became his convert, one of the speakers who followed me said : Mr. Sen will be delighted to hear that it was the same Mr. Adams, who after his conversion by the Raja, came to Toronto and founded this the first Unitarian Congregation in Toronto the members of which Mr. Sen is addressing. Professor Max Muller, when opening ~~his~~ lectures on the Science of Religion, thirty-six years ago, set forth the Declaration of Principles of the Brahmo Somaj as a sort of plea for reconciling western scholars to the idea of a sympathetic comparative study of religions. But what progress have we made since our great leaders showed the way ? What progress has the country made in the acceptance of the principle which is the one vital and life-giving principle of religion in modern times ?

How does the Brahmo Somaj itself stand in relation to the whole country ? We feel the want of an institution to train missionaries ; we are anxious to have a stronger propaganda. But what is it that we want this propaganda for ? Is it only to some set stereotyped *doctrines* which we may cherish as our own, or to a new *spirit and life* that we seek the conversion of our beloved country ?

We have to wake up to the fact that the Brahmo

Somaj, at the present moment, has to face a very critical question. That question is: What is a church? And how can the Brahmo Somaj best realise the idea of a church? We must not forget that the Western conception of the church is absolutely foreign to Hinduism. The vast Hindu organization is a theocratic religious society, but it is not a church in the Western sense.

Then again, in the West itself, the Catholic conception of the church is entirely different from the later conception, that has grown up in revolutionary or semi-revolutionary Europe and America, of the church as a purely voluntary association for certain specific purposes. As distinguished from all these conceptions again we might consider the purely humanitarian organization of the Buddhist Sangha.

The essential point to consider is: Is the church only a purely voluntary association, which a man joins at pleasure, and is free to leave at pleasure, the object of which is to satisfy some limited, specified purposes of life? Or is it a natural society,—a little hard to limit and define perhaps as everything natural is,—into which a man is born, and into the very life of which he grows up with the development of his own,—so that if a man has ever to change such a society and be initiated into another, we speak of that as nothing sort of a new birth? Which of these two conceptions is the more fitting to apply to the Brahmo Somaj? We cannot deny that in its origin, history, and outward appearance it is a voluntary association with a definite object of its own; but if we confine ourselves to that view alone we miss the whole signi-

ficance of the Brahmo Somaj. If, however, we look upon the voluntary-association aspect as only an accident, and the *spirit* as the main, the essential thing,—then, like the heaven, and the grain of mustard seed that Jesus spoke of,—we have to realize that it is but a fecundating particle in a large mass the whole of which it is to vivify and transform. The hard and fast rules of voluntary association may, from this point of view, be in many cases an obstacle and a hindrance. The soul seeks her own by the secret law of natural spiritual affinities ; the mind wants to expand by feeding upon the natural intellectual food supplied by the whole of the social medium, with which it is in contact ; spirit calleth unto spirit through the barriers of a hundred accidental differences of form and appearance, and it is thus that the only true and everlasting church is built. This church can have but one law and constitution,—it is the law of the spirit,—the law of freedom and love,—of absolutely unfettered and uncompromising self-realization. Here is a short extract from the views of Hegel as summarised by Weber,—which is full of light and suggestion on the point :

“ However perfect the moral edifice called the state may be, it is not the highest goal whither the evolution of the Idea tends ; and political life, though full of passion and intelligence, is not the climax of spiritual activity. Freedom is the essence of mind ; independence is its life. Now, inspite of the contrary assertions of political liberalism, even the most perfect state cannot realize this. Whether it be a republic, a constitutional or an absolute monarchy, an

aristocracy or a democracy, it does not cease to be a state, an external, armed, armored power, a kind of prison in which what is essentially infinite is deprived of its vital element. Mind cannot unconditionally subject itself to anything but mind. Not finding in political life the supreme satisfaction which it seeks, it rises beyond it into the free realms of art, religion, and science."

Let not the name of Hegel prevent us from realizing the extreme practical significance of these remarks. No one in these days has given such a philosophical glorification of the state as he has,—no one emphasised more its significance as a means of realizing the Freedom of man. But it is religion alone that makes us truly free,—it gives a freedom, which neither despots nor parliaments, principalities nor powers, can either give or take away. The realization of this freedom is the highest goal of life. What then shall we think of any conception of the church, and of its constitution, which instead of raising the church above politics, imports politics into religion, perhaps even a little more of it than is to be found in the state itself?

These are all serious questions,—and we shall require to put forth all that is best in us,—the light of prayer and faith, our past experience and our future hopes to answer them. And now it is time for me to conclude.

If in the latter part of this discourse I have tried to draw your attention particularly to the danger of the Brahmo Somaj sinking into the condition of a mere sect, or limited association, I hope to be pardon-

ed for it, because I consider the danger to be a real one. At the same time I cannot conclude without emphasizing the fact that in the dispensation of Providence, the Brahmo Somaj has been the first recipient and is still the guardian of a sacred Trust, to which it is under an obligation to God and man to be true to the utmost of its power, viz., the Trust of Sincerity and Spiritual Freedom. But it holds that Trust for the whole country. When I contemplate the International Conference at Geneva, I cannot think of it apart from the whole Christian Community of Europe and America, for which, I believe it holds a sacred trust from God, and the whole of which it is destined slowly to leaven and transform. In the same way I ~~can~~ not think of the Brahmo Somaj apart from the vast Indian Community which it is commissioned by God slowly to leaven and transform. The peculiarities of our organization are only accidents, the rules we may have framed or experimented upon as a voluntary association for purposes of church government are only passing phases,—but the spirit and the life behind them,—these the country cannot afford to lose or do without. I appeal to the spiritual instincts of my fellow-believers, as well as of those of my countrymen who are outside the Brahmo Somaj. Is there not a law of affinity that draws spirit to spirit, and rises above the accidents of physical organization? There is a great work to be done. If Europe and America have their Bible-Problems, and their Church-Problems,—we too have our Scripture-Problems and our Church-Problems. In the West they grapple with these problems, head and heart and soul,—the

best and the devoutest of them, as well as the acutest and the most critical,—orthodox as well as heterodox,—and win light and strength and freshness of life from the toil. Shall we not hope that here also the orthodox as well as the heterodox shall devote themselves to the same kind of work, and win light and strength for the whole land ? In the religious life of a community, the creed, however excellent it may be, taken by itself,—is the element that is the least fruitful, the most akin to dead. It is the living relation between man and man, between community and community, the perpetual alertness of the mind in the pursuit of truth, and openness of the soul to spiritual light, that gives to religion all its freshness and significance. With a religious literature vast and varied, full of the deepest significance and excellence, to study : with a social system unique and unparalleled, with elements of good and evil most provokingly interwoven into it, to study, master, modify, transform : with a population of three hundred millions to educate, uplift, and save,—what could be wanting to stimulate to the utmost the energies of the responsible few to devote themselves to this Great work ? Shall the barriers of sects and denominations still stand in the way ? The work itself, when the spirit is thoroughly roused, shall wash all barriers away ;—nay, when India works along her appointed lines in this sacred work, then alone will she find her own proper place in the great assemblage of nations, and of the children of God.

THE SPIRIT AND PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW DISPENSATION *

As a believer in the New Dispensation I heartily welcome this Conference of Religions—the first of its kind held on the soil of India. While attending the International Congress of Liberal Religions which met at Geneva in 1905, the thought that was brought home to my mind most forcibly was that if there was a land in the world fit to be the home of a Religious Congress organized upon a perfectly catholic and unsectarian basis, that land was India! In the dispensation of Providence India has been the holy meeting ground of all religions. Her interest in them is not simply metaphysical, but supremely practical. To her they are not merely speculative systems stored up in books and collected from far and wide to satisfy the curiosity of the specialist, but they are all living facts, intimately and perhaps inextricably interwoven into her deepest life and thought. The Parliament of Religions which was held at Chicago fifteen years ago was a monument of America's enterprise, culture, and catholicity of spirit. But America's interest in Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Mahammadanism can at best be fitful and evanescent, confined only to the

* A paper read at the Convention of Religions, Town Hall, Calcutta, April 1909.

learned or the speculative few. But it is of the most vital importance to India that she should provide a steady and lasting medium through which Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity and Islam can speak to one another, and make themselves understood, if not appreciated and accepted. For that we want an atmosphere of Light and Love,—intelligence to explain, intelligence to understand, and a thorough spirit of sympathy to welcome the truth, and make an allowance for differences. It is my earnest hope that this conference will succeed in fulfilling its aim of giving us such a medium in such an atmosphere.

You will allow me, at the outset, to put in one word of explanation regarding the New Dispensation upon which you have done me the honour of inviting me to speak. The New Dispensation emphatically declares that it is not one more sect added to the numerous sects and denominations already existing,—because it claims essentially to be the religion of Harmony, the Dispensation which recognises the providential character of, and indeed is itself the fulfilment of, all other dispensations, in the fulness of time. It is not confined to any one country or people, its prophets are to be found in America and Europe as well as in India. Keshub Chunder Sen himself made only the modest claim of being one of its apostles; though, as the Gospel which he preached comes to be more deeply appreciated, and the idea of the Church which he represented comes to be more fully realized, his own singular position in relation to both will, as a matter of course, become distinctly recognisable.

Keshub Chunder Sen thus set forth the object of the New Dispensation :—

“ It is the object of the New Dispensation :—

(1) To reconcile and harmonize the various systems of religion in the world.

(2) To make all churches in the East and the West one undivided and universal Church of God.

(3) To trace the unity of all Dispensations.

(4) To trace the line of logical succession among all the prophets in ancient and modern times.

(5) To reduce the truths of all scriptures to one eternal and unwritten scripture.

(6) To establish universal brotherhood by uprooting caste.

(7) To give a rational explanation of the symbolism and the sacramentalism in which the ideas of great minds are fossilized.

(8) To construct the Science of Religion by adopting the comparative method.

As a further illustration of the attitude of the New Dispensation towards other religious dispensations, and scriptures and prophets, I shall make a short extract from Keshub Chunder Sen's “ New Samhita, ” where the candidate for initiation has to answer certain questions put by the Minister :

Minister: Dost thou believe in the Church Universal, which is the depository of all ancient wisdom and the receptacle of all modern science, which recognises in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity and through all dispensations a continuity, which abjures all that separates and divides, and always magnifies unity and peace, which

harmonises reason and faith, *Yoga* and *Bhakti*, asceticism and social duty in their highest forms, and which shall make of all nations and sects one kingdom and one family in the fulness of time ?

Candidate : Yes.

Minister : Dost thou believe in natural inspiration, general and special ? Dost thou believe in providence, general and special ?

Candidate : Yes.

Minister : Dost thou accept and revere the scriptures ?

Candidate : Yes, so far as they are records of the wisdom and devotion and piety of inspired geniuses and of the dealings of God's special providence in the salvation of nations, of which records only the spirit is God's but the letter man's.

Minister : Dost thou accept and revere the world's prophets and saints ?

Candidate : Yes, so far as they embody and reflect the different elements of Divine Character, and set forth the higher ideals of life for the instruction and sanctification of the world. I ought to revere and love and follow at that is divine in them, and try to assimilate it to my soul, making what is theirs and God's mine.

In the Town-hall address on "We Apostles of the New Dispensation," three distinct principles are set forth as the main characteristics of the New Dispensation, viz,—(1) Immediacy, (2) Syntheticity and Catholicity, and (3) Subjectivity. I will take these up one after another.

I. *Immediacy*: The first characteristic is Immediacy. On the negative side this means that the New Dispensation does not recognize any mediator between God and man—no infallible book, no infallible church, no infallible preceptor (*Guru*) or prophet or saviour. On the positive side it means the possibility of God-vision, of communion and of direct inspiration.

The denial of human infallibility and of the literal infallibility of scriptures is the work of the scientific and critical spirit of the Age—which is its destructive side. The immediate consequence of such denial is the assertion of individualistic rationalism—the unrestrained and unlimited rights of the individual reason. The New Dispensation avoids the two extremes of the doctrine of verbal infallibility on the one hand, and the assertion of unqualified individualism in matters of religion on the other. It gives their proper place to scriptures and churches, and religious teachers and prophets. It believes in inspiration as a fact of life, and in divine providence as a reality. In the history of all nations there have been born in accordance with the needs of the time, great religious geniuses whose souls have been touched with the divine inspiration. These are the world's prophets, and their utterances form the world's scriptures. The individual, if he desires to have the fulness of spiritual life within himself, cannot deny or cut himself off from this stream of light and life that has been flowing down from the heights of the past. He must approach it in a spirit of reverence, albeit of critical reverence, and try to understand and assimilate it not only in the light of

the reason within himself, but in the light of the whole community, which is the true and everlasting Church whose continuity is never broken, and which is the perpetual receptacle of the inspiration that is communicated to man. The New Dispensation thus believes in a Church which has all the characteristic marks of the Church as conceived by the Church of Rome,—unity, sanctity, inspired authority, catholicity—but which is no other than the whole community itself (the Samaj or Sangha) and which, with the progress of the unification of the race, will mean the whole of humanity. It believes in prophets as inspired spiritual geniuses, and it believes in scriptures, “so far as they are records of the wisdom and devotion and piety of inspired geniuses, and of the dealings of God’s special providence in the salvation of nations, of which records only the spirit is God’s but the letter man’s.”

Immediacy is thus not the assertion of individualism in religion. At the same time the New Dispensation particularly emphasises the direct touch of the individual soul with the divine. It is a message of harmony to the world, but primarily and above all it is a gospel of salvation to the individual sinner. Its claim to the name of a “Dispensation” rests upon this very fact that it proclaims once more the truth of this intimate relationship between God and man. The preachers of this Dispensation have borne their personal testimony to the fact of that inner spiritual experience which they have described as “God vision” and “hearing God”; and they have declared that there is nothing supernatural, or occult, or esoteric

about this experience, but it is an experience that is open to every earnest, God-seeking and God-loving soul. It is not simply an intellectual conviction or even intellectual realisation, but it is a soul-experience, intellect, heart, and will acting together ; it is the meeting between God-seeking man and man-seeking God ; it is love responding to Love. This experience is the basis of the simplest act of prayer as well as of the deepest communion. It is progressive, and grows fuller, deeper, sweeter, with spiritual culture. The full realization of this love is the attainment of the Highest in man,—the infinite eternal Bliss. This is the simple doctrine of Prayer and of Salvation taught by the New Dispensation.

II. *Syntheticity and Catholicity* : From the earliest times India has been synthetic and catholic in her spirit. She has not lost herself in the many, but has always sought the One in the many. And to her the One has never been an exclusive or jealous God, a leader of hosts, a tribal or sectarian deity,—but the Spirit, the *Atman*, the Soul of each and all, pervading “all forms of all being.” The Gita says :—

“That by means of which the one undivided eternal Spirit is realised through all the multiple forms of being is spiritual Wisdom.”

The spirit of this spiritual wisdom applied to the religious developments of the whole world is just the spirit of the New Dispensation. It is the spirit “which recognises in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity, and through all dispensations a continuity.” This doctrine of harmony,

however, I am afraid, is not without many practical difficulties.

In the first place, philosophically speaking, we have the new Science of Comparative Religion which owes its origin to the purely modern spirit of comparative study. The object here is to apply, in a spirit of rigorous scientific impartiality, the inductive and historical method to the study of religions, and draw conclusions with regard to the essentials and processes of development of that sociological phenomenon called religion. This study, amongst other results, has led, in the hands of many distinguished Western theologians, to an exposition of the evolution and development of religious faith and religious systems amongst various nations. The great world-religions have thus been placed side by side and attempts have been made to explain their mutual relations, to trace their mutual connections, to place them under appropriate categories and even where possible, to trace a continuous course of evolution running through them. When these attempts are thoroughly successful, it will be an intellectual and scientific vindication of the spiritual faith in the continuity of the dispensations of "Providence throughout the world."

In the next place, the revolutionising phenomenon which the modern age has to face is the close contact into which the world's *religious Ideals* have been brought with one another by the progress of the unification of mankind. Nowhere is this phenomenon more striking than in India. The ideals of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam making a simultaneous appeal to the mind and soul of man—

a momentous contact, or it may be a clash of mighty forces, that had 'so long, along their separate lines dominated the life-evolution of different sections of mankind. Will it be possible, would it be in harmony with the economy of Providence, to keep these streams of forces still separate in future or must there be an intermingling a mutual assimilation, leading on to the evolution of new ideals, the matured fruits of the old ? The New Dispensation does not believe in uniformity, but it believes in unity in the midst of variety. So far as social customs, and religious ceremonials and methods of worship and forms of church organisation are concerned, each community and nationality must go through its own natural course of evolution. But so far as the highest ideals of life are concerned, the world's progress is towards a common culture for all humanity, and in the fulness of time those ideals will no longer be Hindu or Christian, Buddhist or anything else, but the common possession of all ; and in this sense there will be then one Universal Church, and all mankind will worship the same God in the same temple.

III. *Subjectivity* :—The reference to ideals brings me to the last distinguishing mark of the New Dispensation—its subjectivity. The Hindu mind has always been given to idealism. The New Dispensation is pre-eminently idealistic. To it, the world we live in is essentially a *spiritual* world—matter itself is nothing but a manifestation of spirit. The whole interpretation of the world and of life therefore, depends upon the development of our spiritual consciousness. When the spiritual "vision and the faculty divine" is not

opened the whole world is a chaos. As the power of spiritual apprehension is developed, God becomes a reality, and all the personalities and phenomena in the religious evolution of mankind also, become spiritual realities. The significance of this spiritual apprehension has specially to be remembered in connection with two characteristic teachings of the New Dispensation.

(1) *The Pilgrimage to Saints* :—The cardinal principle involved in this is twofold ; first, to take life's ideals not in the abstract, but as embodied in concrete personalities ; and secondly, to look upon these great historical personalities not as outward figures entombed in books, but as living facts of our spiritual consciousness. The New Dispensation never takes Nirvana or Bhakti, or Sonship, as abstract principles ; but always goes to Buddha, or Chaitanya, or Jesus to learn what they mean ; and further, Jesus and Buddha and Chaitanya are not merely figures of history, foreign and extraneous to the mind studying them, but they are, as they must be to every idealist, facts within the mind itself, to be understood, appreciated, and assimilated by the inward power of spiritual apprehension alone, or never to be understood at all. Spiritual sympathy is the only means of understanding Character great or small, whose significance *must* otherwise be completely missed, however great may be the scholarship which we devote to our study. The New Dispensation aims at organising such a spiritual pilgrimage to all the saints of the world, irrespective of denomination or nationality.

(2) *Significance of Sacraments* :—The New Dis-

pensation takes up into itself the sacramental, as distinguished from the purely carnal and secular view of the functions of life. It would abolish the distinction between the church and the home, between Sunday and other days ; it would look upon the most necessary and ordinary occupations of life as indistinguishable from acts of worship. It is from this point of view that it interprets some of the sacraments specially sanctioned by some of the great world religions, such as Baptism and the Eucharist, the *Arati* and the *Hom* ceremony. It does not encourage a multiplication of ceremonials itself, but it endeavours to enter into the spiritual significance of the ceremonials sanctioned by all religions. Its own ideal is a life of simplicity, spontaneity and naturalness, consecrated in all its details to the Eternal Spirit ; looking forward to no other Heaven than a loving union with, and an eternal life in, God.

SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.*

I,

I take it that what is expected of me in this paper is that I should open the discussion to-night with a brief presentation of the sources of our knowledge of God as they are conceived from the point of view of the New Dispensation. In doing so I will refer as little as possible to books and authorities, and deal mainly with matters of practical teaching and experience, the responsibility of the views set forth herein being entirely mine own.

On the very threshold of our enquiry, I believe, it will not be wise to forget that the expression knowledge of God stands in need of a little clearing up. One need not accept all the views of Mathew Arnold about God and religion, and yet one may with profit accept his caution against the *scientific* use of *literary* terms.

"Terms" says he, such as *grace*, *new birth*, *justification*, "which, with St. Paul, are *literary* terms, theologians have employed as if they were *scientific* terms.....In truth, the word 'God' is used in most cases as by no means²a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence,

* A paper read at the Theological Circle, Y.M.C.A., Calcutta.

a term *thrown out*, so to speak at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness, a literary term, in short, and mankind mean different things by it as their consciousness differs." John Fiske, in his little book on the "Idea of God" speaks of the difficulty of giving a satisfactory expression to this idea, and I quote here the well-known passage in Goethe's *Faust*, which Fiske refers to and which gives a sublime voice to this difficulty of expression :

Who dare express Him ?
 And who profess Him,
 Saying : I believe in Him !
 Who, feeling, seeing,
 Deny His being,
 Saying : I believe Him not !
 The All-enfolding,
 The All-upholding,
 Folds and upholds he not
 Thee, me, Himself ?
 Arches not there the sky above us ?
 Lies not beneath us, firm the earth ?
 And rise not, on us shining,
 Friendly, the everlasting stars ?
 Look I not, eye to eye, on thee,
 And feel'st not, thronging
 To head and heart, the force,
 Still weaving its eternal secret,
 Invisible, visible, around thy life ?
 Vast as it is, fill with that force thy heart,
 And when thou in the feeling wholly blessed art,
 Call it, then, what thou wilt,—
 Call it Bliss ! Heart ! Love ! God !

I have no name to give it !

Feeling is all in all :

The Name is sound and smoke,

Obscuring Heaven's clear glow.

Side by side with this let me quote the following observations from Cardinal Newman.

"I cannot take it for granted, I must have it brought home to me by tangible evidence, that the spirit of the age means by the Supreme Being what Catholics mean. Nay, it would be a relief to my mind to gain some ground of assurance that the parties influenced by that spirit had, I will not say a true apprehension of God, but even so much as the idea of what a true apprehension is.

"Nothing is easier than to use the word, and mean nothing by it. The heathens used to say" "God will," when they meant "Fate", "God provides," when they meant "Chance," "God acts," when they meant "Instinct" or "Sense," and "God is everywhere" when they meant the "Soul of Nature." The Almighty is something infinitely different from a principle or a centre of action, or a quality, or a generalization of phenomena. If then, by the word you do but mean a Being who keeps the world in order, who acts in it, but only in the way of general Providence, who acts towards us but only through what are called laws of Nature, who is more certain not to act at all than to act independent of those laws, who is known and approached indeed, but only through the medium of those laws ; such a God it is not difficult for any one to conceive, not difficult for any one to endure.....If the Supreme Being is powerful or skilful, just so far

forth as the telescope shows power, and the microscope shows skill, if His moral law is to be ascertained simply by the physical processes of the animal frame, or His will gathered from the immediate issues of human affairs, if His Essence is just as high and deep broad and long as the universe, and no more ; if this be the fact, then will I confess that there is no specific science about God, that theology is but a name, and a protest in its behalf an hypocrisy. Then is He but coincident with the laws of the Universe ; then is He but a function, or correlative, or subjective reflection and mental impression, of each phenomenon of the material or moral world, as it flits before us. Then pious as it is to think of him, while the pageant of experiment or abstract reasoning passes by, still, such piety is nothing more than a poetry of thought or an ornament of language, and has not even an infinitesimal influence upon philosophy or science, of which it is rather the parasitical production,"

I make only a passing reference to these conflicting views about the Idea of God because they have some bearing upon the way in which it is my intention to present my subject to you. It is of no less moment in the beginning of our inquiry to make ourselves sure as to what exactly we mean by a knowledge at all. It is quite conceivable that a man should have studied all the systems of theology in the world, and yet possess no real knowledge of God at all.

Always in speaking about the knowledge of God let us remember what has been said with such inexhaustible significance : This is Life eternal—to

know Thee ! and also in a text of the *Upanishads* :—

• य एतद्विदूरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ।

They who know this Absolute Being attain immortal life.

The New Dispensation inculcates faith in a God who is both the knowable and the unknowable. Its conception of Him finds a very faithful expression in the following text of the *Upanishads* :—

• नाहं मन्ये सुवेदेति नो न वेदेति वेद च ।
यो न स्तद्धेद तद्धेद नो न वेदेति वेद च ॥

It is not that I know Him well, it is not that I know him not. He amongst us who can enter into the significance of this statement, even he knoweth Him.

To know Him, however, the very first condition that must be satisfied is the opening of what may be called the spiritual sense in man. Here also, as everywhere else, "the beginning of creation is light." It is nothing very extraordinary, it is certainly nothing that requires any straining or unusual effort, it is perhaps a matter of common and natural experience, though it is so rarely that it is accepted as the central and essential fact of life by the people around us. The sense of the touch of this life of ours with the Eternal, of the deep, infinite mystery and significance of our existence ; the sense that man is not a mere creature of the flesh, but he is a spirit, born of the Spirit, living, moving and having his being in the Infinite Spirit ; the opening of this sense is the beginning of the knowledge of God :

through all life, through all eternity is this knowledge perfected. In the beginning it is an act of self-revelation of God to man, a free gift of the spirit,—like birth itself, like eye-sight, like self-consciousness,—a natural adjunct of the rational, spiritual life with which man is endowed. The perfect knowledge of God is conditional, as the Hindu *Rishi* puts it upon *tapasya*— तपसा ब्रह्म विजिज्ञासस्व —Enquire after *Brahman* by means of *tapasya* and *tapasya* means the concentration of the whole mind and heart and soul, the consecration of each faculty, and power, and desire, of thought, speech, and conduct to this one pursuit.

The process of this perfecting has to be carried on by waiting for, watching, and receiving, the self-revelation of God through every phase of life, every department of culture, every channel of experience, by means of a conscious, responsible appropriation by the spirit. By the “sources of our knowledge of God”, then I mean the factors that contribute towards the beginning and the carrying on of this process, and I shall proceed to present, in as few words as I can, our views on each of these sources, as they are commonly conceived,—viz. (1) The human soul itself, (2) Nature, (3) Revelations through particular individual men, incarnation, prophets, saints, men of genius, (4) Revelation through books—scriptures, inspired and holy records, traditions etc. (5) Revelation through the organised life of humanity,—and as a special application of this,—revelation through the Church.

The primary and fundamental self-revelation of God is in the individual human soul. What this

belief implies may perhaps be roughly analysed in the following :-

It implies in the first place, that God is a spirit, and if He is to be realized at all, He must be realized as a Spirit by the spirit. Were it possible to conceive that He should take some visible shape and appear before the eyes of man, that would not at all make Him more intelligible, or bring Him nearer, if the man before whom He thus appeared missed the spiritual significance of the appearance. On the other hand, the soul of man realizes Him only when it learns to look upon all shapes and figures and sights and sounds as mere veils which it must pierce through in order that it may get at the spirit, through it must be remembered that all physical manifestations of the Supreme Spirit fall infinitely short of what He is in Himself.

The belief implies in the next place that the knowledge of God is natural to man. The spiritual sense is there within, and though it may often lie dormant, and its opening may require some help, some suggestion from outside, yet that opening always means simply an awakening of the soul. In his recently published autobiography, Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, the venerable patriarch of the Brahmo Somaj, thus speaks of his first awakening of the spirit. He was then in his eighteenth year, his grandmother was on the point of death, and carried, according to Hindu custom, to the river-bank, whither he accompanied her. At night, the sound of the distant singing of a death-bed hymn, entered his ears, and produced in him an indescribable feeling of

aloofness from the world. "So long", he continues, "I was immersed in the pleasures of the world. I had never exercised my mind about spiritual truths. I did not know, I had never been taught, what religion was, what God was. That unearthly joy of the place of death, the natural, spontaneous joy of the moment was to my mind irrepressible. Speech is altogether feeble, how can I explain this joy to others? It was a natural joy. None can attain it by reasoning, through arguments. God seeks His opportunity to pour this joy into the soul. In good time did He give it to me. Who will say, there is no God? Even this is the proof of His existence." In a similar strain Keshub Chunder Sen, in the opening chapter of his *Jiban Veda* or Scripture of Life, (a number of autobiographical sermons delivered just before his death) thus speaks of his first spiritual experiences :—

"The first lesson of the scriptures of my life is Prayer. When no one helped me, when I did not enter the membership of any religious systems, or adopt any as my own, when I did not resort to the company of any believers or devotees; in that dawn of my spiritual life, the voice that sounded in my heart was 'Pray'! 'Pray'!.....I never took thought whether I should repair to the Christian Church, to the Mahomedan Masjid, to the Hindu Temple or the Sanctuary of the Buddhists. From the first I had recourse to that supplication before God which is greater than Veda, or Vedanta, Koran, or Puran, to prayer I held fast."

The so-called Brahmo doctrine of Intuition generally misunderstood, often but inadequately and

unsatisfactorily explained, is simply an attempt to give a philosophical expression to this spiritual experience. The experience is in harmony with that teaching about the sense of absolute dependence which Theodore Parker, following Schliermacher, so persistently emphasises, and that spontaneous sense of the Infinite which Prof. Max Muller conceives to be the fundamental source of religion, and that revelation of God through conscience that Cardinal Newman speaks of with such enthusiastic conviction.

In the third place, I feel it necessary to state that this belief that the primary revelation of God is within the individual soul, does not imply that the experience of the individual is the sole or final test of spiritual truth. That test is always the harmony between what the individual takes to be the revelation of God within himself, and the actual, never-ceasing, all-regulating Self-revelation of God in the universe. All that the belief means is that the source and seat of the knowledge of God are primarily in the soul of man, and the progress and perfecting of that knowledge depend upon the progressive development of that soul itself.

I now come to the second Source of our knowledge of God—viz. Nature. From our point of view, Nature helps us to acquire this knowledge through a threefold process.

First, the poetic interpretation of Nature. The basis of this interpretation is to be found in the mysterious sympathy that exists between Nature and the soul of man, and the inexplicable suggestiveness of the whole visible universe. From the Rig-

veda hymns to the poetry of Wordsworth, from the beautiful imageries of ancient Greek and Hindu mythology to the admiration of Kant for the starry heavens, we have illustrations of the way in which Nature appeals to the soul of man, the way in which she takes that soul out of herself into some region beyond. The forms of the Rig-Veda hymns may get antiquated, and the imageries of ancient mythologies may fail to satisfy, but Nature will never cease to be a mystic veil that perpetually invites the soul to look through it into the great unknown, the infinite invisible beyond. This poetic interpretation, however, is simply emotional, suggestive, full of beauty, awe, mystery, sweetness, consolation, peace, but it can never by itself be the rock-foundation for an abiding religious faith.

We have next, the scientific interpretation of Nature. Here we have to consider the *spirit* of science, as distinguished from the *conclusions* of science. With regard to its conclusions, I believe there is not a single scientific man at the present day who will claim any degree of finality for them. What is the line of demarkation between Life and Not-life? What is the relation of Biology to Psychology; of Physics to Physiology? How far has Psychic research lifted the veil from the other world? Science has as yet no unanimous answer. Whether under the guidance of Comte the search for final causes is to be absolutely condemned and given up, or with John Fiske it is to be maintained that there is a dramatic purpose in the cosmic process,—even, perhaps, “some far off divine event towards which all creation

tends",—is a question about which, I am afraid, authorities are not yet agreed. But as regards the spirit of science our position is to accept it, to welcome it, as the most helpful ally of religion, one of the most effective means of acquiring a knowledge of God,—provided it is purged of certain elements that are found to be adhering to it though they are really foreign to its nature. The spirit of science is iconoclastic,—sternly, relentlessly iconoclastic. It says Behold God as He is enthroned in His universe, and break and throw away all the petty images that you may have formed by your imagination and enthroned in your fancy. So far we accept it. But that spirit is also sometimes exclusive, narrow, blind. It says—only one method I know, and that method is materialistic. It does not recognize the spirit and the spirit-world. So far it is merely sectional and not universal science, its method is suicidal, and it will have to be cast out by the spirit of science itself.

I pass next to the metaphysical Interpretation of Nature. Here we find that this interpretation leads to the view of God both as immanent and transcendent.

The universe is not merely suggestive of the Infinite, as Poetry would lead us to think ; it is not merely regulated by infinite Intelligence, as Science would make out ; but we realize that God is the life of the universe,—its indwelling spirit and soul. Woven out of His thought and intelligence, the apparent world of matter resolves itself ultimately into a thought-world, where matter is only concretized thought, and the laws of nature are simply the

self-manifestation of the supreme spirit. If this immanence of God is real and plain, His transcendence is equally real and undeniable. The Infinite is in the finite, but the finite is not the Infinite ; God is in Nature, He is also above and beyond Nature. One thing, however, is perfectly plain to us. This transcendence does not mean and cannot introduce any duality in the nature of God, far less any contradiction. God as He is above Nature does not and cannot contradict Himself as He is in Nature. To us His transcendence means the following : Each moment flies, the Eternal remains ; Time, this ceaseless stream, beginningless, endless, as our conception goes, wherein wave after wave rise and disappear making the whole look like one flickering string of illusions, rests upon a basis of eternity ; the Eternal reveals Himself ceaselessly through creation, all these self-revelations leading ultimately to Him who, as our ancient *Rishi* sang, is such that,—

यतो वाचो निवर्त्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह ।

आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान् न बिभेति कुतश्चन ॥

From Him, the unattainable, all speech recoils equally baffled with the mind ; a knowledge of the Bliss of that Brahman casts out all fear.

I pass now the third source which I have put as—Revelation through individual men,—incarnations—prophets, saints, men of genius &c.

My first point in this connection is that we do believe in incarnations. We believe in inspiration, we believe in inspired men. This is not the place where I can attempt to give an elaborate philosophy

of incarnation, as we understand it, even if such a philosophy be possible. Genius in every form and shape is a mystery : in that particular shape it takes, which we call an inspired man, it is infinitely more inexplicable. I venture, however, to transcribe here the definition of revelation which I gave at another place, and I am encouraged to make this repetition, because the definition had the support of a scholar like Prof. Sayce.

"Revelation, I take it, is the record of what is revealed to the soul of Genius in the moment of its highest exaltation." However we may account for their existence, we believe there have been such men of genius in the spiritual world, who reveal God to us as no ordinary mortals can, and who take us nearer to His spirit and presence than we could ever hope to advance simple by our own unaided efforts.

The next point to note is what gives them their special character. I believe it is their reality. They make real the dream of humanity. They are the fulfilment of the prophecies of ages. It is but the other aspect of this reality that we note in their supreme, surpassing ideality. There are depths in their character which ages cannot find the bottom of ; there is a significance in the words which they utter, which generations and centuries do not feel tired with the effort to understand fully. They are witnesses unto the reality of the Father, the reality of his Love, his Grace, his saving power. They bring light into the soul that is struggling in the midst of darkness. They are stars in the midnight sky that never set, while our poor lamps have gone out. They are

witnesses unto the immortal destiny of man. They reveal all the possibilities of our nature, which, without them, we could never think of. They carve a message out of the cross, they infuse a tone of sweetness into the singing of some familiar word or name, they fish a pearl out of the dark depths of eternity which all mankind are eager to accept, and can never afford to part with. In the broken, imperfect speech of man, they leave for the world a Gospel, which, while it gets clearer, fuller, riper, more deeply understood more widely applied in the course of the ages,—is the most luminous, the most reliable, the most convincing and the most fruitful of all the sources that we possess of our knowledge of God.

In my treatment of the subject I have tried to keep as far away as possible from what is merely dogmatic, or academic, or scholastic, or conventional. None of us can forget that we, who have assembled together here for the purpose of a common discussion belong apparently to different religious denominations and possibly to different schools of thought. In speaking to you, however, I have not felt simply called upon to represent the views of any particular denomination or church to which I may professedly belong. I have not troubled myself with the question—What are the Sources of the Knowledge of God according to this author or that book, according to this sect or that school of thought? But the question that I have tried to keep before me is. What have been the actual Sources of the Knowledge of God to me. I believe such a limitation of the standpoint to be necessary in our present discussion if we are to guard

ourselves against being lost in an endless maze of fruitless speculations into which one is sure to be decoyed by simply handling the hundred different forms of belief and philosophy, and let me add, no-belief and no-philosophy that are current in the world, without any distinct aim or purpose of one's own. In speaking of the sources of our knowledge of God, I ask myself: Is the term God,—a mere empty phrase with me,—or has it any intelligible contents which my soul can grasp? I do not care much in this connection whether these contents as they appear to my soul are exactly what others conceive them to be, or whether I can myself always express them with perfect definiteness and comprehensibility, if only these contents are to me real and not to be put by, and not a mere fancy or illusion. I next proceed to ask myself—What actually are the sources from which I have derived a knowledge of these contents? I believe it is only by putting ourselves in some such attitude that we can make ourselves really intelligible to one another, that we can get at each other's soul, and not shut one another out with the veil of mere words and speculations.

With regard to the two sources of our knowledge of God left untouched by me in my paper,—viz.—Books, traditions &c. or what may be called the world's Scriptures, and the organised life of Humanity, or in a special sense, the Church,—I believe one point is simple and clear, and this is their importance. If there is a God to be known at all, how can we know Him better than through the record of the

world's best thoughts about Him, and the working of His Spirit in the life around us,—in the active, living beings and spirits that make up the Society that we live in? The difficulty arises however the moment we try to enter into particulars. How much of my knowledge of God have I derived from books as distinguished from other sources? And then, can I draw a sharp line of demarkation between certain books and others as specially conveying this knowledge in a way such as no other books can? And then, is there anything peculiar in the origin of such books, and should there be anything peculiar in the spirit or attitude of mind in which such books ought to be accepted? If I have learnt something, and that something very deep and genuine, both from the Bible and the Geeta, can I still say that there is any test by which these two books can be put under two entirely different categories? And if they belong to two different categories,—is that a fact which every individual can and ought to find out by the exercise of his own reason and judgment, or is he simply to accept it on the authority of some outside person or body or church?

If such be the difficulties about scriptures, the difficulties are no less great and no less complicated with reference to the church. By the church I understand the whole living society around me considered as an embodiment of the divine life and the divine law. I cannot question that my faith and convictions, the whole mode of my thinking and living have been shaped and determined essentially and to a considerable extent by this life around

me. But it is proper and will it be possible, nay, is it absolutely necessary for me, except for the purpose of some special and perhaps provisional and temporary discipline, that I should mark out a certain portion of this Society and call that in a special sense my church? Can such a church teach me more about God than any other body can? For the purpose of acquiring this knowledge, what should be my relation, what should be the extent of my obedience to it? Do I recognise Raja Ram Mohan Roy to be a member of this church, and not Theodore Parker or Martineau? Do I realize a manifestation of the divine spirit in the uplifting of the soul that I felt after listening to the conversation of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, and not in the sense of sanctification that I had by a personal contact with an Anglican Divine perhaps the next day? If I believe that one special mode of the self-revelation of the divine spirit is through the living church.—will this revelation be the fuller, more living, more soul-satisfying for me, the more I keep it confined within the limits of space and time, race, nationality, tradition, caste and sect; or the more I take it outside of these limitations?

The spirit of the New Dispensation is opposed to all artificial restrictions and limitations. It believes in the inspiration of the Bible as well as of the Geeta; it would listen with reverence to the words of John Henry Newman, as well as of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Yet it is not the spirit of mere liberalism. It is not simply the voracious indiscriminate universalism of the critical student of History or Sociology, or even comparative theology and religion.

The main thing to remember is that *inspiration* is a fact. There are inspired books and inspired men and inspired facts and events in History. God is a living and a speaking God. He speaks through men, through the recorded thoughts of men, through associations and congregations of men. But it is only the inspiration within that can recognise this inspiration from outside. We know of no other test by which we can separate that which is inspired from that which is not. I see no ground for any serious apprehension that religion will be put upon an unreliable, precarious basis if we thus take the inspiration of the individual soul, or the unaided independent judgment of the individual as it is called, as the test of the inspiration of sacred literature and of the church. As regards the individual himself, I know of no religious system or denomination that provides any means whereby the church or the sacred scriptures can be of any use towards the salvation of the individual in the absence of this grace from within. And as regards the continuity and permanence of God's truth and Gospel of love in the world, I believe there is a provision in the universal heart of humanity, whereby, though individuals in whatever numbers may be buried here and there in darkness and hardness of heart, inspiration shall never fail in the life of man in the present to take in and keep up the inspiration of the past and pass it on, a richer and a fuller current, to the generations of the future. The rule of faith of the Catholic Church, it seems to me, approaches very near to this position in spirit though not in form. In the words of Cardinal Wiseman: "Such is the threefold com-

position of the provision made by God for the acceptance of his holy religion,—a divine revelation, having its essential basis in his written word ; an unfailing authority to preserve, propose, and explain it ; and an inward aid to receive and embrace it.” We should be prepared to accept this statement almost in its entirety only with the following explanations. First, for the salvation of the individual, we consider the last of these elements—viz.,—as Cardinal Wiseman puts it, “an inward aid to receive and embrace the message of God,—the strengthening and life-giving grace which God sends down into the soul ; which infuses faith as a virtue into the heart, ready to be exercised the moment its object is properly placed before it,”—we consider this grace and inward inspiration as of primary and essential importance. In the second place, “the unfailing authority to preserve, propose and explain” the message of God, is not necessarily confined to any limited earthly organization,—but is as wide as the universal Heart of Humanity. The so-called visible church may be that authority ;—or like everything human, it may rot and stagnate and become corrupt, and lose its inspiration and so cease to be that authority ; but the inspiration itself never departs altogether from the life of man, and the authority never passes away,—only it changes its seat from one set of men to another. Our position is,—not wherever the church is, there is this inspiration and authority,—but wherever there is this living inspiration and authority, there is our church. In the third place, we do not believe that the written word of God is confined to any particular book or literature ; but

wherever in any book or literature there is divine inspiration, even that is the written word of God. Taking these three elements in their mutual relation as thus put, I think we may find therein an answer to the question raised by the Rev. Mr. Watt at our last meeting. In the development of a man's religious faith and knowledge the part taken by the Church interpreted in this sense, and the inward inspiration of conscience are equally essential. They are both lights from a common source that strengthen and supplement each other in clearing up the message of God to Humanity at large and the individual soul in question.

The responsibility of the individual becomes enormously great no doubt, when we thus widen the sphere of inspiration, perhaps it becomes even greater than what was conceived by the writers in the "Essays and Reviews." The late Archbishop Temple, in the opening essay in that book, on the Education of the World, speaks of the perfecting of the education of man, through three stages,—first, in the period of childhood, through mere obedience to laws; second, in youth, through the influence of examples; and lastly in manhood, by the free and voluntary cultivation of principles. We believe the highest point in this period of manhood is reached, when the individual feels within himself not only the force of principles, but also the breath of inspiration, and finds therein a glass that reveals to him the secret of the self-revelation of God in the literature and history of all parts of the world. It would be a loss indeed if the development of the manhood of

the world were to mean an outgrowing the sense of a living contact with God in the thought and life of humanity. In the childhood of the race man looked upon God as a law-giver from outside, in its youth, man realised the presence and incarnation of God in particular examples of humanity ; will the growth of manhood, and the growth of principles mean a liberalized, but at the same time absolutely secularized life and society and literature, in no part of which has the direct breath of God any part ? This, I believe, is an entirely false way of looking upon human history and human literature.

I now come to the difficulty pointed out by the Rev. Mr. Watt ; If the ultimate test of each individual's knowledge of God is placed in the inward conviction of his own soul, where is the safeguard against the possibility of error ? I fully realize the depth, the enormity, I might say, the awfulness of this difficulty. Particularly when we remember, there is sin, there is selfishness in our nature, casting their dark shadows upon all our thoughts and cogitations, veiling the face of the Eternal, distorting the truth of our own being and destiny, the pursuit of a pure knowledge of God might almost appear to be a hopeless task. What illusions, fancies, and hallucinations may not delude the soul even in the name of inspiration ! What dark, abysmal depths may we not be decoyed into by following mere will-o'-the wisps, and taking them for the eternal lamps of heaven ! Dreadful are the possibilities of life, when the soul is its own steersman in this fateful voyage through the unknown, mysterious depths of eternity.

My answer to this is : In the first place, I do not know of anything that can take off this mystery from our existence. Even St. Paul wrote, "With fear and trembling, let us serve the Lord." In a genuine, self-surrendering religious life, I do not know where there is room for that positive certitude, that shallow, complacent confidence, which pretends to have looked into the very bottom of the mysteries of God, and banishes from life all sense of sacred fear and along with it all genuine humility, reverence and delicate self-devotion.

In the next place, I believe, in the very nature of things, this gap, like the Slough of Despond in Bunyan's allegory, is a void that cannot be filled in.

The hankering after infallibility, or some infallible test of infallibility, (as if in the ultimate analysis of things there could be any distinction between the two !) has tormented man like a demon, and led only to restlessness as its end. Alas, God alone is the Eternal Truth, in Him alone knowing and being are absolutely at one, He alone is infallible. We must look at him through our imperfections,—how can we behold the absolute truth as it is in Him ? Even when He speaks directly to us we listen with our ears which are but defective organs—when He speaks through another human voice, the voice that communicates and the ears that listen are both imperfect,—when He speaks through a Body or Association of men, the same imperfections and limitations are there,—when He speaks through History, behold ! History is but an imperfect record. God could not, unless He ceased to be God, incarnate Himself or communicate

or reveal Himself in such a way as to take away all these imperfections and limitations. The mystery of divine self-manifestation, the self-revelation of the Absolute through the conditions of space and time is beautifully explained by Sankaracharyya with the help of his doctrine of Maya, in his commentary on the Vedanta, but this is not the place for me to enter upon it.

We must remember in the third place that these necessary limitations and imperfections of human nature do not absolutely condemn the individual soul to taking its own darkness for the light of God. Human knowledge is not infallible, but it is progressive. The present generation builds upon the foundations laid down by the past, avoids its errors and hallucinations, and leaves a fuller and clearer light as a legacy to the future. Every individual is born into this light as an inheritance from the past. Soul responds to soul, eye looks into eye, the light within is fed by and adds itself to the light of all humanity around, and thus the sin and selfishness and blindness of the individual receive their corrective from the great, throbbing heart of humanity, whereunto it is bound, and thus the individual and the race march onwards towards the goal of perfection in truth and righteousness and peace and joy.

FAITH AND REVELATION.*

Faith and Revelation are essentially phenomena of life. They are simple and ultimate facts of experience which cannot be understood and properly appreciated unless they are actually felt and realized, or at any rate, unless we have practical illustrations of them before us. Faith is a quickening power, not simply an intellectual apprehension. A revelation is a clear, uplifting vision which fills the soul, not a mere dogmatic assent to unintelligible mysteries. It is a mistake to suppose that the days of faith and revelation are gone by, that they belonged to the world's age of darkness, to the period of infancy and nonage of the race which mankind have now outgrown. The true darkness is the absence of faith, whereof the present age and the modern man may undoubtedly claim to have their fair share, but it must not be supposed to be a monopoly of the modern scientist or pseudo-scientist. Scepticism, pessimism, cynicism, and all the maladies and ill-humours of life with which they are associated were, we may be sure, quite as familiar in the ancient and mediæval world as they are in the modern world. In the process of evolution, they constitute the resisting factor, the element of inertia, the crude matter, in the language of Hindu

*A paper read at the Theological Circle, on Monday, the 29th March, 1909.

Philosophy, the element of *Tamas* or darkness,—while faith is the dynamic principle, the propelling power, the creative force, the element of *Rajas* and *Sattva*,—organizing energy, and being and light. At each step in the process of evolution, at each stage in the progress of history, we find faith leading the vanguard, battling with doubt, mistrust, laziness, blindness superstition, vanity, tradition, custom, all the heavy weight of the innate lethargy and inertia of man. The deliverance and progress of Israel from the land of bondage to the land of promise is, in this matter, so beautifully typical of the progress of the human race. Faith with the magic wand leading the way,—seeing visions and hearing voices in the burning bush, bringing down commandments from the lonely hill-top, looking upon the distant land of promise from Pisgah-heights, calling forth sweet waters of life from the barren rock-side and showers of life-giving manna from heaven,—and the multitude following,—obedient and rebellious by turns, now rejoicing, grateful, reverent, the next moment depressed, cursing, blasphemous, setting up the golden calf for worship, but on the whole pressing onwards through the wilderness towards the blessed land.

It is an utter misreading of the significance of the spirit of our own age, I believe, to characterize it as an age without faith. If the ancient and the mediæval spirit was a spirit of faith in God, with a certain distrust in, and in certain cases, even an absolute condemnation of, nature and man, the modern spirit is a spirit of faith in humanity combined with faith in nature. Modern science and modern democracy are

simply an embodiment of this faith. "Nature never deceives the heart that trusts her" is the motto of the one; "Man will not betray the trust that may be imposed on him," is the creed of the other. Only the other day while reading the report of the Annual Congress of the Co-operative Union in England for 1908, what struck me most was the glowing faith of the President and of the several speakers in co-operation,—and ultimately in humanity, irrespective of race, colour and creed. Talk of faith becoming antiquated or obsolete! Nothing can be farther from the truth! It has received perhaps a larger meaning, and established for itself the claim to be considered as the root-principle in every concern of life—in education, in society, in politics, in economics, as well as in religion. From being confined to the church and to Sundays, and to thoughts about another world alone, it has come to dominate the whole life of man.

It is only a shallow view of science which suggests that the knowledge which science brings in supersedes faith, or even is opposed to it. One might as well say that a knowledge of Optics supersedes the use of vision, or a knowledge of the science of cooking or the science of digestion supersedes the necessity of eating! Science itself presupposes faith, and the highest achievements of science both theoretical and practical have been the results of faith and inspiration. But while there is no antagonism between faith and science, there is undoubtedly a very real antagonism between faith and secularism and materialism. Faith is supra-sensuous, while secularism and materialism keep themselves confined

within the bounds of the senses and the sensuous. Faith lives in a spiritual atmosphere taking a man out of himself, out of the present and the actual, and puts him into touch with that which is beyond himself, the infinite and the ideal. The true scientist is always making such an excursion out of himself. He is in communion with the infinite mystery outside himself, waiting in trust and hope that it will give up its secret to his patient and reverent enquiry, curbing his own will and putting aside his own prepossessions, knowing very well that only when his own minor lights are put out, will the great Light of the universe shine within. The secularist and the materialist, on the contrary, are cribbed, cabined and confined within their own little selves, they have no conception of a beyond. What they actually see before them in the present is all the world they can think of, their interest reaches no further. They alone seem to be incapable of any real faith.

We have now arrived at a point when we must be a little more critical. I have so long been using the term faith rather in a wide and loose sense, in order that by fixing our attention upon different varieties and manifestations of it, we may get some insight into the essence of faith itself. There may be so many different kinds of faith, faith in so many different things.

There have been men of faith in science, as well as men of faith in religion: Christian martyrs, as well as martyrs who have cheerfully given up their life by experimenting upon themselves to find out the property of some medicine, or in the latest experi-

ment in aerial navigation; men of faith amongst social and political reformers; Chatham and Washington as well as Luther and St. Paul, Asoka and Akbar, as well as Guru Gobinda Sing and Raja Ram Mohon Roy. Faith then, we may say roughly at this stage, is *the capacity to reach out to some object with the whole soul*. But what about the object itself? Is the faith itself a guarantee that the object towards which it is directed is true and real and noble? Here our answer must be negative. Faith by itself is not a test of truth. It is a subjective capacity of the soul, not an objective criterion of reality. Faith has been likened to direct, intuitive, vision, but even direct vision is not a guarantee against illusion. Constituted as we are, there is but one ultimate test of truth. To express it in one word,—it is the harmony of universal experience. In vision as well as in faith, there is but one way to know if the object towards which it is directed is a reality or a mere illusion. Does it fit in into the universal system of things as that system is unfolding itself through the course of the ages? It is somewhat like what we have in connection with some of the Kindergarten toys. You take the different pieces of a picture board and try to put each in its proper place. Are the place and position you give it the right one? The only answer is: Do the different pieces, as you place them, fit into one another so as to make the one complete, continuous picture? So also in actual life. My faith is right if it is in harmony with the universal system of things unfolding itself through the ages; if it is not in such harmony, no matter what its intensity is, or how it came to me, or by

what number of men it may be held, nothing can save it from being an illusion and a superstition.

But just mark one point. The illusion is false, but the capacity of the soul by which it grasps that illusion is real. You may mistake a rope for a serpent, but you cannot, on that ground, call to question the fact of your possessing the sense of sight. No blind man would be capable of a visual illusion. When a man sticks to an illusion with the intensity of faith, we call him a fanatic. Great is the mischief that such an illusion may do. But still the fact remains that here is a soul that belongs to the class of those that have the gift of vision, and not to the class of the blind. His vision may be false or misinterpreted and requires to be corrected and directed by the proper tests; but he is not amongst those who, so far as the phenomena of sight are concerned, are utterly irresponsible, and will remain a perfect and undisturbed blank.

We have provisionally laid it down that faith is the capacity to reach out to an object with the whole soul. Let us proceed to a somewhat fuller understanding of what this means. People are constantly demanding a psychological, epistemological, and metaphysical explanation of faith. Is it opposed to reason, or is it simply a function of reason? Or is it some independent intellectual faculty superior to reason, though not opposed to it? Is it some feeling leading to, or accompanying, certain intellectual convictions? Is it something that depends upon an act of the will? A historical exposition of faith from these various points of view would be full of interest.

but we shall try simply to glean a few suggestions from the controversies of the past about the matter.

Sir William Hamilton's exposition of faith would, I believe, appeal least to the modern mind. The Absolute, according to him, can never be an object of consciousness or of reason, because reason and our whole consciousness is subject to the law of relativity. The Absolute, therefore, is only an object of faith, which itself rests on the testimony of revelation. A more mechanical, artificial, and unintelligible presentation of the whole subject of faith, of revelation, and of the Absolute could hardly be imagined. An Absolute out of all relation to reason and consciousness is an object in which we can have very little concern; and how can faith in such an Absolute be possible through a revelation which, after all, does not really reveal Him?

We get equally little help from Tertullian's—"Credo quia absurdum est," "I believe, because it is irrational." As a practical protest against the corruptions of reason, as a defiance of the evil counsels of worldly wisdom, as a clear, uncompromising enunciation of the radical difference between the man of faith and the worldly-wise man, the declaration is worthy of a militant man of faith. But as a metaphysical or theological doctrine it hardly challenges any serious consideration.

It is to be noted that Anselm's "*Credo, ut intelligam*," "I believe, in order that I may understand," sets up no such opposition between reason and faith. It simply claims that faith may precede understanding, and that in the matter of dogmas

which are authoritably laid down by the Church, it ought to do so. When rationally interpreted there is, at any rate, no psychological impossibility here. Provided a proposition does not contain any innate contradiction, one can quite easily accept it, and believe it to be true, even though one does not immediately grasp its full contents. Such trust in superior wisdom, such deference to authority, is a familiar fact of experience, an essential condition of progress. The whole principle of the education of the young presupposes it, we are ourselves practising it almost every moment of our life.

But is this all that we mean by faith? Is it simply a trust in the superior wisdom of others, a deference to external authority? Note that Anselm, as well as Tertullian, is speaking simply of a "*credo*",—a belief in dogmas, an assent to propositions. Faith goes beyond dogmas and propositions. It must be in touch with *things* and *persons*. It is not simply a process of intellectual assent, but it is something that places us in a direct relation with living realities.

Does it any way take away from the significance and validity of such realities, if we speak of them as *postulates*, as Kant does? God, Freedom and Immortality are postulates of the Practical Reason to Kant. What Kant means by this, as I take it, is not that they are any the less real or more remote than objects that are directly connected with the pure or practical reason, but that they are brought into relation with our souls through a special process which is faith. They are postulates just as life is a postulate of breathing and digestion and circulation of the blood.

Faith is thus neither opposed to, nor independent of, Reason, but it is intimately and indissolubly correlated to the practical Reason. Each exercise of the practical reason brings us through faith into touch with those great realities which are its necessary implications. *

Kant, however, is speaking as a metaphysician. He has his analysis and classification of the equipments of the mind into Reason, Understanding, Sense, and to him God, Freedom and Immortality are but the necessary implications of one of these. When, from such metaphysics, we turn to the direct, straightforward expression of the soul-experience of a genuine man of faith, we realise the inadequacy of the metaphysical explanation. St. Paul's enunciation will perhaps always be accepted as the best : "Faith is the evidence of things not seen and the substance of things hoped for." St. Paul is not making any distinction between Reason, Understanding and Sense, between Intellect, Feeling, Will ; he is not speaking of a "postulate", or a "credo";—but he is speaking of actual things and realities ; at the same time—things and realities, which are not seen, and which are hoped for ; and still further, though hoped for, their substance is somehow or other always in possession, though unseen, their evidence is in themselves. This expresses fully the unique character of faith. It puts us into relation with the ideal, not with the actual ; it takes us beyond the present and beyond ourselves ; and, yet, it has all the glow and passion and intensity of an immediate realization so as to deserve the name of a direct vision. It may be universal, like reason, but it requires the appropriate culture and discipline,

the proper condition of the soul, and the proper occasion, to call it forth. It is not simply a capacity like Understanding and Sense ; but it is a virtue, put in the same category by St. Paul, with Hope and Charity, and accepted by Luther, as the one essential condition of salvation.

Here we have a simple expression of experience. As regards its scientific explanation, I am gratefully indebted to Ward's Gifford Lectures on "Naturalism and Agnosticism," for suggestions that throw considerable light upon the whole question. Is not the classification of the so-called faculties, or capabilities of the mind into Reason, Understanding etc., after all an artificial arrangement, a mere contrivance of science, which does not affect the real nature of the mind itself ? The soul in itself knows no distinction between Reason and Understanding, or even between Intellect, Feeling and Will. The soul only lives and grows. As Ward puts it : "Every concrete experience is a process of self-conservation, is a life." There is no cognition apart from feeling, no cognition and feeling apart from conation. The indivisible concrete life of the soul is broken up in prism of our imperfect analysis, and looks here as feeling, there as cognition and so on. But the life itself is one, and in that life, if one element deserves more consideration than another, Ward maintains, "conation is more fundamental than cognition."

The soul then is living, is growing, is constantly reaching out beyond itself in various directions. This reaching out of the soul towards the ideal we call faith. Mark that the life of the soul, like the life of

everything else, has two aspects ; one is self-conservation—which consists in a through possession and organization of the elements already acquired ;— and the other is self-expansion,—going out beyond the elements already possessed in search of new life. • The life of the soul assumes one form under the first, and another under the second. The first is Knowledge, the second is Faith. Note particularly that by the first, any more than by the other, I do not mean more cognition. Knowledge—self-knowledge or knowledge of nature,—is cognition, feeling and conation combined,—it is a full possession, and realisation of self and nature, *i. e.* as much of them as has been brought into our life,—made the subject of study and science and enjoyment—thoroughly appropriated and organised. Faith likewise, is cognition feeling and conation combined—it is a reaching out towards that which is still unrealized—the infinite Ideal beyond. The one is as much *real* as the other, in direct immediate touch with it infusing its own life and soul perennially into it.

How much vain speculation about faith would be put a stop to if only we could disabuse our mind of the misconception that it is merely a form of cognition. How can the Ideal and the infinite become an object of cognition ?—is a question that has puzzled the minds of philosophers, and given some countenance to doubters. Hence the attempt to put the Ideal and the Infinite into a formula,—a dogma, a mere proposition, intelligible or unintelligible, and smuggle that into the possession of man, despite reason, as an article of faith. This has been a

hundred times worse than open scepticism; for scepticism at any rate encourages no deception. But the sceptic as well as the dogmatist has to be reminded that the Infinite is not an object of mere cognition, to be squeezed into an article of belief; but a grand Reality that stands revealed only before the fulness of life itself.

The fuller and purer your life is, the deeper, clearer, intenser will be your faith. If your life is starved and stunted, faith will be an impossibility. You can study mathematics with a half-starved life, or analytical science, or banking accounts, but you cannot have faith. Here the Infinite himself has laid down His inexorable law; only through your life shall you know him and realize him. It is only a morbid, artificial standard of culture that dissociates cognition from the other elements of life and expects in that was to attain to a knowledge even of the Highest. But this expectation will be for ever frustrated. Loss of the very capacity to realize God, to understand what faith means, is the penalty that a people pays for forgetting that life in its fulness is what man is intended for.

In the absence of faith, life shrinks. All the higher things you cease to believe in, cease to exist for you. The sun and the stars are blotted out for the blind; when the eye of faith is blinded, man is but a self-centred prisoner in the dark prison-house of his own petty self.

May we not say that there is something analogous to faith even in the lower regions of evolution? The plant which is placed in the dark, reaches out its soft

tendrils in the direction where there are openings for some passage of light. The bird, when winter comes, sets out in its long migration to the warmer region which it has never seen. If the plant and bird had language,—would they not say, the plant, that it had faith in the Sun though it had never seen him ; and the bird, that it knew its place of pilgrimiage through faith ?

My paper has already become rather long, and I must not think of taking up in detail the rest of my syllabus. It is hardly necessary for me to do so. If I have been able to make my position clear with regard to faith, my interpretation of revelation follows as a corollary. It is hardly necessary to repeat afresh that a mere book revelation, or a revelation confined to some remote point in space or time, is not worth the name of a revelation. All revelation is a direct revelation to the spirit. The message may come through a book, or through some human personality, or some other manifestation ; but it can never be grasped in its true significance, unless the spirit is ready to receive it. There are moments when the spirit is so attuned to the Infinite Spirit as to catch easily the notes of harmony that flow therefrom. There are spirits of men thus attuned far beyond the average, that catch those notes, while others hear nothing, and carry them to others. Such spirits have been born in all ages and all climes ; such moments may come to every individual soul. It is in such moments and through such spirits that Humanity gets the sustenance that it feeds upon, the impetus that carries it onward.

Literature, Philosophy, Science, Religion, Social reform, Individual regeneration,—all get their matter and impulse, their life and inspiration, from this source,—and thus, in the past as well as the present, Faith and Revelation constitute the true constructive factors in the development of man.

FAITH AND REVELATION*

II

Towards the conclusion of my last paper, I attempted to explain the distinction, as I apprehend it to be, between knowledge and faith. It is a long standing distinction ; nay, the relation has often been conceived to be not one of mere distinction, but even of antagonism ; appearing again and again, under different conditions, in various forms : as the distinction between philosophy and theology, or secular philosophy and divine philosophy, or science and philosophy, or *apara vidya* and *para vidya*, or *Avidya* and *Vidya*, or *Jnana* and *Bhakti* ; in each case the distinction receiving its peculiar colouring from the peculiar point of view from which it has been looked upon. The point in each case has been that somehow or other knowledge is confined to a lower plane, concerned with inferior things, while faith alone is the passport to the supreme and eternal concerns of life.

I have not taken the distinction in that light. I look upon knowledge and faith as two distinct aspects of concrete experience, or two distinct functions of life into which, as Ward puts it, every concrete experience resolves itself. In one aspect,

*Read at the Theological Circle, Y.M.C.A., on Wednesday, the 7th April, 1909.

concrete experience or life means *self-conservation*, in the other aspect it means *self-expansion*. We *know* the things that are already in our full possession, we *have faith* in things that are still unseen and only hoped for. At the risk of repetition, I must once more point out that neither knowledge nor faith is a mere act of cognition ; each is a function of the whole life, including cognition, feeling, and conation. Knowledge is a thorough conscious appropriation of as much of life as has been given us to realise. I know myself so far as I have thoroughly understood myself, tasted and enjoyed myself, lived and realized myself. I know the whole world so far as I have understood, enjoyed and realized the world. Knowledge is appropriation, assimilation, organisation, full working out and enjoyment of the elements already received,—in one word, it is self-conservation in its many-sided bearings.

It is undoubtedly a distinguishing characteristic of the present age that it has not despised knowledge—and let not this be a matter of regret, it is a matter of congratulation and great rejoicing rather,—it has not despised the present out of a regard for the future, it has not despised this world out of a consideration for the next, it has not despised this life out of a regard for the life to come ; it has not despised the known out of a regard for the Unknown. It has been endeavouring thoroughly to appropriate, assimilate, fashion and work up and enjoy the materials given to it. And for this it has had its reward.

Is it then out of place to talk of faith to such an age ? Not, if expansion be as much a necessity of

life as conservation. A self-contained self-sufficient existence can have no impulse of faith, no appreciation of or sympathy with it. The stone, hard and rigid in its outlines, can give us no insight into the pulsations and throbbings with which the whole of living nature is filled from the lowest vegetable germ to the soul of man. Faith is essentially dynamic, a phenomenon of movement and development, a striving, throbbing, stretching forth of life.

What meaning can faith possibly have to one who has never felt any such strivings and throbbings within his bosom ? We talk of the faith of the lover, the patriot, the hero, the martyr. We can never understand the secret till we go behind the veil into the secret chamber of the soul of each. Would the lover have his faith but for those earnest, anxious yearnings which put his soul into a mystic sympathy and communication with the soul of his beloved ? What anxious days and sleepless nights must be the patriot's watching ceaselessly to read the writings of Fate and scan the destiny of his people, days and nights of fasting in the desert and silent communion on the hill-top, before he attains the insight and the faith that make him the leader of the multitude—and as circumstances determine—a hero or a martyr ? Take away the yearning, the striving, the watching, and the very condition of faith is removed. In the words of the Poet of Faust :

“ Who never ate his bread with tears,
Nor through the long-drawn midnight hours
Sat watching on his lonely bed,
He knows you not, ye heavenly Powers ! ”

It is just conceivable that there are certain conditions in which faith is an impossibility—for an individual, or for a nation. The first would be a condition of total absence of any aspiration. The second would perhaps be a state of perfect attainment, —when possession, and organisation and enjoyment, would be everything. A third condition perhaps is a state of despair, leading to utter demoralisation, when through repeated delusion or failure, the mind loses all faith and sinks back into utter lethargy, and frivolity and degeneration. This last condition is common in the case of individuals, and is quite conceivable in the case of a whole nation.

The yearning of all life, in all its various forms, in its striving after self-expansion, is towards a perfect environment ; the yearning of the human soul is towards God. The roots of the plant wind themselves into the pores of the earth where the sap is the sweetest the branches spread out in the direction where the light is the nearest. Exactly in the same way and literally, like as the heart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth the soul of man after Him who is perfect wisdom and perfect love. The only question is : Is there any real response to this longing, any revelation made before the yearning vision of faith which is not a mere illusion ?

From my point of view, it is essential that the longing, the yearning, *i. e.* the striving of life should be there before any response can come in. The usual standpoint taken by philosophy or theology in the so-called attempt to prove the existence of God is to ignore, or be silent about this longing, and establish

its argument upon a purely intellectual basis. This to my mind is to begin entirely at the wrong end. We are not at all concerned to prove that belief in God is or must be a universal belief, to establish that atheism is a rational and intellectual impossibility. If there be atheists amongst men, even if their number be legion, that would not disprove the reality of God, any more than the fact of there being blind men would disprove the reality of light, or the fact of there being men who have no perception or sense of Beauty would disprove the reality of Beauty.

Let us rather give due weight to the fact that a man of faith is a rare being. The number of men who have the courage to profess atheism is very small indeed compared with the number of the vast majority whose belief in God is a mere profession, a hearsay belief, a device to avoid the trouble of independent thinking, a thoughtless assent to a mere proposition, a concession to public opinion and social feeling. And even amongst the extremely few who might be styled as real men of faith, how few and far between are the moments when the light of faith is not eclipsed by foreign matters, is an actual burning and shining light within the soul !

The presence of so much wide-spread traditional belief in the existence of God serves really to obscure the significance and depth of our relation to God. The presence of so much metaphysical speculation also serves only to make the confusion worse confounded because neither traditional belief, nor ingenuity of argument, nor subtlety of speculation can ever take the place of that immediate living relationship which alone

makes God a reality to man. When that living relationship is realised through the response that comes to the yearning of faith the name that we give to such response is Revelation.

- . This appears to me to be the soundest way of drawing a distinction between revelation and simple belief or reasoned out knowledge. A revelation is a response to a deep-seated yearning of the soul. The deeper and purer, more earnest and persistent the yearning, the intenser is the light of the revelation. There is nothing supernatural about it, no violation of any law of nature or any law of reason. It rests upon the simple, natural process of the great World-Spirit responding to the earnest life-striving of the soul.

The end of an intellectual pursuit is a truth. The end of a reasoned argument is to induce intellectual assent or belief. The same result may also be attained by the force of testimony which one can trust. But the response to a life-impulse is *life*. That is the supreme mark of a revelation. It is not only an intellectual conviction but it is a quickening power, an influx of new life. Such life-giving influences can come from another Life alone, from the Universal and Supreme Life.

The Association Psychology has worked wonders in the hands of Hume and his followers in the way of accounting for so many of our beliefs and habits of thinking. But still there are certain things which lie beyond it. It cannot account for the ever-renewed presentations themselves, which constitute experience in its endless variety and freshness. It cannot account for the life-principle of the soul itself—which is

a selective, assimilating, organising, ever-growing power, and which partly receives and partly constitutes by its own life-process the world that it lives in. In the same way, it fails to account for this influx of new life as distinguished from a mere intellectual apprehension or assent, which constitutes the essence of a revelation.

Historically speaking, we are familiar with three distinct forms which have been accepted by men as the possible channels of a revelation. First of all, we have the belief in *Sruti*,—or impersonal revelation—records of high wisdom attained through revelation by great "seers" or Rishis in the past, the weight of whose personal authority adds nothing to the weight and sanctity of the high wisdom recorded. The Wisdom is there—as simple Wisdom, as Logos, the World, the Veda—for any one who has got the soul to perceive and assimilate it. Secondly, we have the belief in prophets, or inspired men,—spiritual geniuses who received special revelations,—and communicated them to other men,—of which class the Hebrew prophets and leaders, of various types from Moses to Jeremiah, and Mahomet may be taken as examples. Lastly, we have the belief in incarnation, of which we have two typical examples in the orthodox interpretation of the Gospels and of the *Bhagavadgita*.

It is not at present my object to enter upon a consideration of the validity and value of these historical revelations. They have moulded the lives of nations and been the most powerful factors in the evolution of the race. Only we have to note that admittedly in these cases the great masses of men

are only indirectly influenced by the revelation. A few great seers, or prophets, or Masters, are in direct touch with Divinity, the rest of mankind only through them. For a long time to come, I believe, this must still be the rule. In fact, we might say that there are two orders of revelation—world-revelations, and revelations for individual life. God is not an abstraction, but reveals and communicates himself as Life to the yearning of life. In the case of "seers" and prophets, great spiritual geniuses, they are representative men—men who take up into their own life the life of the whole age and people amongst whom they live,—their wants and diseases, their aspirations and yearnings, and thus the response of the World-Spirit to the heart-throbbings of these representative men—is a great World-revelation,—an influx of a new life-giving spirit which teaches men to think of God and man in a new light, and to lead a new life. In the case of ordinary men, they have their own life-yearnings, and the response to these yearnings is an influx of spirit to suit their own special individual needs.

One very deplorable effect of the belief in world-revelations, however, has been, to surround the very notion of revelation with a halo of mystery and supernaturalism, and to encourage a spirit of dependence in spiritual matters. The ordinary mind shrinks from the very thought of a revelation being possible to it. This is infinitely better than the arrogance and affection, and the innumerable delusions into which men are on the other hand, led by spiritual pride. And yet, every human life, even the

humblest, is after all, a *spiritual striving*. There is in it a longing for true wisdom and love, for freedom and harmony and immortality. Too soon, in the large majority of cases, the grosser weight of existence, —I call it grosser because it is *felt* to be grosser, but the bondage is too strong for the soul to shake it off,—crushes out the very longing itself. We feel how the life of the individual would be different, how the relation between man and man would be different, how the relation between one community and another, between one nation and another would be transformed if only this spiritual striving could be carried on to its proper fruition. But can you have this striving without faith; can you have faith without this striving? The effort to live the highest life and faith are the correlatives of each other, indissolubly mixed up and both draw their inspiration from the Spirit of infinite Wisdom and Love that constitutes the environment of the soul.

We seek a justification for our faith. In one sense, faith is its own justification. For it is an expression of the whole soul, the whole life of a man. The real difficulty lies there—in getting an expression of the whole soul. In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, perhaps in a still larger proportion, man is a creature so divided within himself,—the head at war with the heart, and both at variance with the will! When you can get all the three to work together, and their combined striving finds expression in a certain faith, I would say unhesitatingly that that faith is the right one for that man. What though it may be contradicted by a hundred wise and

even good men of the world ? What though even it fails to stand the test of the ages ? As the poet puts it :

"Now, who shall arbitrate ?

Ten men love what I hate,

Shun what I follow, slight what I receive,

Ten, who in ears and eyes

Match me ; we all surmise,

They this thing, and I that : whom shall my
soul believe ?"

Let the soul in such a case believe itself, act up to its own light, even against the whole world.

"For more is not reserved

To man, with soul just nerved

To act to-morrow what he learns to-day."

For it is not the function of faith or revelation to bring within our grasp the whole mystery of the Absolute as it is in itself ; but to put us in direct touch with God as much as we need him. When we speak of the wisdom and love and holiness of God, we can never forget that we are using only relative terms, *i.e.*, we are speaking of wisdom and love and holiness in the highest sense in which we have so far been able to realise them. But they may have higher and deeper meanings than we have yet realised. Our realisation is only progressive, depending upon the progressive evolution of our own life. At each stage of this evolution faith grasps only that aspect of the divine life which is appropriate to it. It is not final, neither is it wrong and valueless. At each stage, faith is its own justification. A later age and a more delicately evolved humanity finds out its deficiency of expression and applies the necessary

correction. But the spirit was right and stands eternally justified.

Let not this progressive evolution of Faith be brought forward as an evidence against its validity, as a mark of its mere subjectivity, of the unreliable character of all revelation. Mark it is a *progressive* evolution, a *progressive* realisation of the depths of the divine nature. A mere illusion is without law and order, a shifting, elusive something that breaks away and dissolves into nothing. A reality may grow and unfold more and more of the hidden depths of its nature—that does not stand in the way of its being a reality. Generation, after generation, age after age, has been realising, in a deeper, subtler, more refined sense, the meaning of the Infinite, the import of infinite Love and Wisdom, but that does not make faith, revelation or God an illusion.

Just one point more. A friend of mine who has read my previous paper with interest, a distinguished medical man of the city, writes :—

“Cannot we conceive that the rapidity of what we call as our intuitions or our faith depends upon two things :—a favourable environment and a perfect system of nervous centres. *Instinct* or *faith* then is not *suprasensuous*, but is dependent upon sense perfection more or less. Instantaneous faith of instinct, if it is ever noted, is the result of sense perfection in a favourable environment. Faith is then a quality of a healthy nervous system. Faith is clear and perfect in the perfect man. This is a simple explanation, and we can readily understand that in prophets and men of genius, the highest type of

nervous development, of mind and soul is the expression of the completeness of the organism. This conception does not lose either in spiritual or moral value. We develop God in us in accordance with the more or less completeness of our system."

I shall make only one or two observations on this.

I heartily welcome this testimony from a medical man of high authority as to the correspondence between the development of our physical organism, particularly the structure of the nervous system, and spiritual culture. This only corroborates the view that faith is an expression of the whole life.

Of course, I must add that in the present state of our knowledge of the relation between the body and the mind, we can speak only of a *correspondence* between the two; so that instead of saying that faith "depends upon a perfect system of nervous centres," let us say it corresponds to a perfect system of nervous centres. No system of a spiritual culture can ignore this correspondence between the body and the mind.

In the next place, does faith depends upon a favourable environment? Much depends, of course, upon the interpretation we put upon the word "favourable". Favourable in what sense? If we say favourable to the growth of faith, we beg the whole question. I do not know what other definite and acceptable interpretation can be offered. In any case we have to remember that most of the men of faith have been also martyrs, men born in adversity, bred up in the face of opposition, who had to seal their faith with their life-hood.

Then as regards the nervous system itself, is

not that also largely a mystery even to the modern man of science? Are not its capabilities and possibilities practically unfathomable,—as shown in certain abnormal and morbid conditions, and also certain conditions of perfectly normal and healthy excitation? Inspiration and genius, as well as faith and revelation, might be connected with a subliminal self, or unconscious cerebrations, or mysterious affections of the nervous system. What we are concerned with is that they are facts, healthy and normal facts of life, essential elements and powerful factors in the evolution of man, based upon reality, and bringing man into progressive touch with the Infinite Reality; and lastly, in some mysterious way, there is a correspondence between these and the physical life of man.

The next question is: are we justified in speaking of faith as suprasensuous? Not in the sense that it has no physical basis, or correspondence with some nervous centre.

That was never intended. All that I mean by describing it is suprasensuous is that it takes us beyond the narrow, sensuous life of the self, or for the matter of that, beyond the narrow spiritual life of the self too. It puts us into touch with the infinite beyond. There is no contradiction between this and admitting that it has a physical basis. It is only a diseased body that cannot forget itself. Every disease of mind or body sticks it down to itself. A perfectly healthy system is self-forgetful, transparent, reflecting like a mirror the reality of the universe outside. There is no contradiction then in saying that faith has a physical basis and yet it is suprasensuous.

I am particularly thankful for one very suggestive observation contained in the letter. "We develop God in us in accordance with the more or less completeness of our system." Only in the place of the word "develop" I would substitute "realise".

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

The propositions that I would place before our Circle to-night are the following:—

I. Forgiveness is a phenomenon that belongs to the highest region of human experience. The question of forgiveness arises only when a pre-established relation of love has been outraged. The question of the forgiveness of sin, therefore, can arise only when there is a conscious and wilful outrage committed against the Supreme Love. It presupposes, therefore, a consciousness and realisation of this Supreme Love already established in life.

II. Forgiveness is not to be identified with the remission of punishment. Punishment is a phenomenon in the necessary chain of causation, forgiveness belongs to the pure world of freedom. Punishment is an inevitable award of the Law, forgiveness is a free gift of the Spirit that is Love.

III. Forgiveness means the final atonement. It is the reconciliation of spirit with the Supreme Spirit. The effect of the reconciliation upon life itself is the supreme mystery of the spiritual world. That effect consists not in an abrogation of punishment or a cessation of the Law of Necessity, but a spiritual renovation, a re-birth, which works out a new life through the Law of necessity itself. It is in this mystery that we recognize the triumph of Spirit over matter, of freedom over necessity. It is here alone that man can turn to

Fate and say : I fear thee not, for I am a child of the Eternal, and eternally free !

I. To take up my first point.

Forgiveness is essentially a phenomenon in the world of love. It is the beloved alone that has a claim to be forgiven, it is the Lover alone who has the right and the privilege to forgive.

We do not perhaps always stick to this sense of the word forgiveness in our ordinary conversation, but there can be no doubt about its real psychological significance. The King, who in the exercise of his right of mercy grants a pardon to the criminal under sentence of death, has, we would say perhaps, *forgiven* the murderer. . But he has really done nothing of the kind. The sentence of death in this case is purely a matter of human institution, justified by the laws of one country, not justified by those of another, at best contingent and conditional. The pardon in this case means that the King has the right to punish the murderer with death, and he has also the right to withhold the particular punishment, and in this case he chooses to do the latter.

If the King had himself been the injured party, and had desisted from inflicting any punishment or even entertaining any feeling of resentment against the offender, we would call that also forgiveness, with a nearer approach perhaps to the true sense of the term. When Abraham Lincoln declared that he forgave his murderer with all his heart, we take it as a beautiful illustrative instance of forgiveness. But even here the complete psychological conditions are wanting. The offender was a perfect stranger, and

there was no going forth of his heart towards Abraham Lincoln before or after the deed. It was a case of heroic self-mystery, and saintly calmness and sweetness of spirit on the part of Abraham Lincoln, and nothing more. For true forgiveness there must be a reciprocity between two souls.

On the other hand, when Jesus looked at Peter after he had denied him thrice, there was forgiveness in that look, for we know what Jesus was to Peter and what Peter was to Jesus before those denials, and we can imagine what Peter must have felt after he received that look from his master.

When we speak of the divine forgiveness, it is clear that we must strictly confine ourselves to this last sense alone, for the punishment of sin is in no way contingent or conventional, and the divine pardon cannot mean a remission of this punishment. It is not also conceivable that there should be the possibility of any resentment in the divine nature which forgiveness is to soften down or melt away.

How then can we speak of forgiveness at all with reference to God? How can he who is always just ever forgive? How can he who is never angry, ever forgive? Our answer is that neither legal punishment nor anger is an implication of forgiveness in the highest sense. True forgiveness is a correlative—not of punishment, nor of resentment, but of wounded love. Now the very first proposition in the doctrine of forgiveness is that God loves man, and this love is eternal. And if love is a factor in our relation with the Supreme Being, and it is possible for us to sin against that Love, though that love itself is not

capable of any resentment, nay, because that Love is absolutely immaculate, forgiveness becomes a psychological necessity and the supreme need of our spiritual nature.

• In every form of religion, I believe, the forgiveness of sin must ultimately mean this and this alone. It is only in the lower strata of man's spiritual existence that the punishment of sin and evil-doing is supposed to proceed either from the anger of God or from a justice that is capable of relaxation, and the prayer for forgiveness means that the anger should be appeased, or that the demands of justice should either be relaxed or satisfied by some vicarious atonement. But when the level of pure spirituality is attained,—the only cry of the soul is: "It is against Thy love and love alone that I have offended, forgive me and make me worthy of Thy love. As regards other things, even if Thou slay me, still will I trust in Thee!"

Till the soul attain this clear spiritual vision, I believe it would be a piece of mere anthropomorphism, and superstition, to speak of the forgiveness of God. And if there is in the Brahmo Samaj any characteristic teaching on this point, it is simply this that the Brahmo Somaj believes in the possibility of a real love for the Spirit-God apart from all incarnations. In Hinduism (as also in other religions) the love of God and the forgiveness of God must ultimately have the same spiritual significance, but in the Purans and the whole of the Vaishnava literature these relations and feelings receive a colouring from the belief in divine incarnations which we, in the Brahmo Somaj cannot but

look upon as only a passing phase in the religious development of humanity. In the relation between man and man, forgiveness admits of all the three different shades of meaning that I have already referred to,—it may mean the remission of a punishment that is due, or the absence or softening down of resentment in the face of some offence, or finally the mystery of the unspeakable depths of wounded love. A belief in incarnation makes it possible to transfer all these shades of meaning from human into divine forgiveness, and construct a whole literature of devotional poetry, sweet and engrossing and not without a powerful influence upon the growth of spiritual life, but which, all the same, will have to be superseded as the twilight brightens into the clearer dawn of day.

What the Brahmo Somaj has been aiming to do is to combine the Philosophy of the Vedanta with the devotional ardour of Vaishnavism, filling in both with concrete contents of aspirations after a pure life within and the foundation of the Kingdom of God without. Not even for the masses would it tolerate any superstitions, however sweet and pleasing. Its ideal is the Truth,—for each and for all. But Truth does not exclude Love, nor does it exclude practical morality and the aspiration after the Higher Life. To the Brahmo Somaj, therefore, while discarding all superstitions, and discriminating between the truth and all allegorical poetry even of the highest order, the forgiveness of God is a solemn reality fraught with endless significance.

We can understand how the mere intellectualist would object to such an expression,—because he has

no experience to correspond with it. To him God is only the Absolute Truth,—his own imperfections, or sins, if you prefer to call them such, are but so much defect of light, so many areas of nescience which are in the process of being filled in through birth after birth, æon after æon, till he becomes completely merged in the Ocean of Light. He looks upon all emotions and activities perhaps as a sort of disturbance, at best as passing ripples on the surface, beneath which are the calm, motionless depths which he is to attain. He cannot realize what is there to be forgiven, or who is there to forgive anything but a phase of *Maya* or a moment in the transitory world-illusion, evident enough in the relations between the finite and the finite, but not in any way connected with the eternal Reality.

We can understand also how the mere moralist, or the legalist, and we might include the scientist also in this category, would look upon divine forgiveness as an old, effect superstition, very popular in the childhood of the race, which the educated and enlightened world has now outgrown. He understands Law, and the operation of law alone,—unbending, unexceptionable, relentless, inexorable,—both in the mental and in the physical world, he understands also the co-operation and correlation of laws, and will admit also that so far as his vision goes he has not yet unravelled all the possible intricacies of such co-operation and correlation,—but as regards forgiveness,—Nature knows no such thing, it is an absolute snare and a delusion.

The point of view changes when we realize that there is infinite Love at the core of things, as well as Truth and Law. As far as the world-order, or the life of Nature is concerned, this makes hardly any difference at all. The law by which the sun rises and sets, and fire burns, and man is born and passes away still continues the same. Nature is still a perfectly-ordered series of phenomena, known to us only by glimpses mystic and awful in its unknown depths, always inviting and always baffling our best endeavours to penetrate into its mysteries, but known or unknown, the whole resting upon an inner law and harmony about which no doubt would be rational. The infinite Love is there, not to break this law and harmony, not to disturb the eternal truth of things. But its presence and its realization give an altogether new significance to the life of the spirit. It calls forth a new response from the soul of man, which turns life into a consecration, a vow, an offering. Man is here, not simply to live, and to know and to act,—but to *will*, *i.e.*, to give a direction and a shape to his whole life, to make or not to make it an offering at the altar of that infinite Love. The light of that Love becomes henceforth the main spring, the motive power of life ; and Sin comes to mean, the breaking of a vow,—a separation from, a shadowing of that light, which darkens the soul and deadens its powers. No true life is possible till the soul returns to God, and there is a reconciliation of the spirit with the Spirit. On the part of man, it is repentance, while from the other side we call it divine forgiveness.

II. NOW TO PASS ON TO MY SECOND POINT.

Does this reconciliation of the spirit with the Spirit mean a remission of punishment, a cessation of the consequences of sin ?

It is the punishment that mankind dread,—and it is this that they have been anxious to get rid of, when prayers have been offered to Varuna or to Jove for forgiveness or for freedom from bondage. The notion also of what constitutes the real punishment of sin has sometimes been so fanciful, often so superstitious. A plague or a famine, any special affliction or visitation of nature, may be connected with some known or unknown sin, and the divine mercy be invoked for forgiveness, *i.e.*, the removal of the affliction. All this is sheer superstition and must go. Even if science could connect each act with all its consequences, and thus an evil act with all its evil consequences,—then if the evil-doer repented and became a changed man, it would still not be reasonable to suppose that his own life and that of others would at once cease to suffer from the consequences of his evil-doings in the past.

So far Science is right, and the law must have its course. But even here we might stop for a moment to consider how much of the processes of nature itself is distinctly remedial. You put your finger into the fire, or deliberately swallow some poison,—and the law of nature at once begins its operations ; but consider also how quick and how active are the silent forces in your own system that set about at once to repair the mischief, and save you, if possible, even without the

slightest intervention of your own will ! And then come the medicines,—discoveries of your own observation and research,—provided also by nature. Within certain limits, we might say, Nature also is anxious to save the sinner, and give him another chance, when her laws have been outraged. She too has forgiveness, and her unchangeable laws are not inexorable only to punish !

III. I SHALL NOW FINISH WITH A WORD OR TWO ABOUT MY LAST POINT.

Divine forgiveness means the final atonement. It is the tuning of the soul with the Supreme object of its love. Sin means a break in that harmony,—a faithfulness of the spirit, a rebellion of the will. Repentance and forgiveness mean a return to faith, a fresh consecration of the will to its supreme Love. I need hardly explain that this does not mean final salvation, or the attainment of perfect holiness. A whole world of darkness is still to be conquered, crude materials to be put into shape,—unknown trials and sorrows to be overcome, innumerable possibilities of sin to be turned into bright actualities of a pure and righteous life ;—in fact, the whole of life still remains to be assimilated to the divine life. But what this tuning of the soul with God means is that the soul is on its right way, the will is in its right attitude. That, in fact, is the supreme thing for a man, for herein lies the secret, the key of his whole life, the answer to the Sphinx-riddle of his existence. For human life is a composite thing, mysteriously made up.—So much, in the way of gifts and dispositions, good and evil, brought from

the past, so much in the way of consequences of the man's own deeds in the past, so much received from the environment, in the way of both light and shade, joy and sorrow, giving him smiles and tears in a mysterious, most unaccountable fashion. In the midst of all this, what is he? Wherein lies his self, his essence, his own real individuality?—He is the being that has the privilege of knowing and loving God.—the True, the Good and the Beautiful, and consecrating himself to Him, by being a co-worker with Him. In this world of phenomena, he is a spirit, just as God is a spirit. Everything else is matter,—a mere material to be worked upon, pliant to his touch, as to the divine, only in a more limited way, so that he may shape it after the great Ideal. When he loves God and loves his Ideal, his genius is creative, his heart is tenderly virile, his will is strong, and bent upon fashioning everything that comes to it, in the shape of joy or sorrow, good fortune or bad fortune,—into the noble and perfect life which is his goal. When he ceases to love his God and his ideal, and his heart and his will go astray, his acts make for self-destruction, he is weak and despairing, lost in darkness and misery. Repentance brings him back to the Love, that is now deeper and mellower in the added lustre of forgiveness, and this means a new life, a new putting forth of the energies of the spirit upon the materials of the world of necessity. Thus the world of Karma, bound by the Law of Karma, goes on, fashioned by the spirit that is eternally free into the perfect world that is to be, which is the Kingdom of Heaven.

A THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE FOR INDIA.*

The following short and hurriedly drawn up notes about a Theological College for India are presented as an appeal to every one who is interested in the religious future of this great country. They are not conceived in the spirit of any sectarian religion. Not that I mean to cast any reflection upon those who in the spirit of sincere and earnest conviction, are trying to develop themselves along certain special lines of spiritual culture. A certain amount of specialization, of hedging round of one's cherished beliefs, of cutting deep the channels of feeling and practice between carefully guarded banks along which the habitual life of the man is to flow, in short, a certain amount of narrowness, perhaps, is almost a necessity to the ordinary individual, for the deepening of faith and life. And yet, even with this admission, the question what should be the right basis of a college for Theological studies in India, is one that claims a thorough, searching investigation from every fair-minded person, who is not altogether sceptical about old questions sometimes presenting unexpectedly new aspects and openings for consideration. With the traditions of the University of Nalanda, with its broad-based structure of Theological studies and spiritual culture, India ought

*A paper read at the annual meeting of the Brahmo Somaj Committee, April 7, 1906.

not to shrink from the idea of having an institution worthy of her in the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is difficult to describe the mingled feelings that come into the mind of an Indian student travelling abroad for studying the theological and religious institutions of the West. An admiration, in the first instance, for the keen and deep, though undoubtedly sometimes wild and revolutionary, spirit of hankering after the true Light,—the light of truth at any cost ; a puzzled sense of bewilderment and suspense, at the sight of the old reverences dying out, sometimes without bringing in any new ones ; a natural feeling of pride at the thought of earnest scholars in the West trying to enter into the spirit of the religions of the East, with chairs in almost all the great Western Universities for encouraging oriental studies, with a sense of humiliation at the thought of how little we are ourselves doing in the same direction ; an indescribable sense of sorrow, sometimes almost of despair, to find how stolidly indifferent the great mass of society in the West is to all such questions, how absolutely unaffected the life of modern civilization is by the spirit of these investigations, and even in the case of the few scholars whom alone they concern, how almost inevitably, they miss the true ring, and feel, and hidden meaning of what they have devoted their life to enquire into ;—in the midst of these perplexing thoughts one naturally turns back to India. Is there absolutely no *reality* left in her life at the present day ? If the three hundred millions of her people be not altogether a dead mass, she must still have a message to give to the

world, which the world can find nowhere else. The western scholar has risen to the conception that God is no respecter of persons, and there is not a land or people that He has left without a witness of His spirit,—and in the spirit of the most earnest inquiry has he questioned the Rigveda and the Koran, the Suttas and the Avesta,—found inestimable treasures therein,—but missed the life behind them. He is only a student of systems,—Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism,—these are but systems to him; and nothing more. The Indian turns back home, and wonders,—all this seething life around him, what does it signify? The monk in Burmah and Ceylon,—is he but a stuffed effigy, or has he still within him breath and movement? Have not the genuine Vedantist and Maulavi still some message to give which the country may hear? Is it absolutely impossible that they should be brought together to speak from the same platform, yea, teach in the same college, be given and use the opportunity to do their best to place before the world what is most precious, most permanent in the treasures that they have inherited from the past? It is as a simple student, an anxious enquirer that I ask this question, and am I wrong in believing that there must be hundreds of students, in Calcutta, in this country, and even in other countries, who will be most grateful to learn if only they could find such teachers?

I think I ought to be a little more explicit in clearing up my idea of a Theological College for India. In the first place, then, I believe, it ought not to be an institution, professedly or primarily, for the training of ministers and missionaries alone. Where a course

of rigid dogmatic or disciplinary training is not an object, it is hard to see why a Theological institution should be regarded as primarily or specially intended for would be ministers and missionaries and not so constituted as to attract all classes of earnest religious inquirers. From what I have seen of such institutions in England and America, it has been my experience everywhere, and herein I have received confirmation from the students themselves, that what they call the practical part of the training for ministers in such colleges, is always the least effective, if not worse. To take a service, or preach a sermon, simply as a matter of exercise is perhaps the very worst method that could be suggested for true religious culture. The habit encroaches upon the spirit of genuine earnestness, and gives to faith and one's life-work itself a tinge of unreality, which is fatal to true spiritual life. The college is intended to give light and exercise to the intellect, let it suffice for that alone. Whatever other discipline of the Spirit one may seek, let him seek it elsewhere,—in the actual trials and struggles, the genuine experiences of love and despair, joy and sorrow, in the ever-fresh fields of life itself.

In the next place, here in India, even within the Brahmo Somaj, our ideas of missionary life, are too undeveloped, and even too divergent perhaps, to admit of our having a common institution for the training of missionaries. For that purpose we must still have special institutions, Seminaries, or *Asramas* or whatever we might call them, for special spiritual culture and training accordance to the ideas of each section.

In the next place, again, the work of religious

development in India, under the present conditions, calls for a natural bifurcation. There is the work for the educated and cultured few, and there is the work amongst the uneducated, or not highly-educated millions. We shall have to grasp this situation thoroughly, and regulate the methods of our work accordingly. A high, critical theological culture can as yet be but the aspiration of the few, while for carrying on the main, solid work amongst the people, we want men, with a sound education and the right sort of views and ideas of course, but still more with a spirit of loving devotedness and sacrifice, which one need not seek and does not necessarily find in the library and lecture rooms of a Theological College.

The fact is what we want most urgently at the present moment is an institution the object of which shall be not to teach dogmatics, but to make researches into the domain of religious truth. The great problem that we have to face is to have a constructive theology, —and I want particularly to emphasise the fact, that we have not yet got it, but have still to make it,—which for us, Indians, will bring religious faith into harmony with all the developments of modern science and culture, give a definite rational expression to the native, undying instincts and aspirations of the human soul under the trying conditions of modern life, find out the meaning and historical significance, as well as the permanent elements of truth and excellence in the faiths and institutions of the past, sift them from whatever is ephemeral and gross, and recognise therein a common bond of mutual respect and sympathy for all mankind, and thus lay down a firm intellectual basis in

the first place, for a national religion for India, and ultimately for the welding together of the human race into one universal brotherhood. We want a theological college that will make substantial contributions towards this constructive theology of the future. Its central, guiding principle will be the principle of perfect spiritual freedom and unrestricted liberty of investigation, combined with a spirit of reverential criticism as applied to the great historical faiths of the world,—which have practically all their living embodiments in India, and a spirit of thorough, earnest unbiassed enquiry into the social conditions of this country. Its aim will be to bring out clearly and disseminate as widely as possible the pure light of a spiritual faith which is the soul and highest aspiration of every form of religion, as well as to enrich and deepen the religious life of our country by drawing from the past and pouring into it whatever is pure and true, and of abiding worth in our inheritance from the past.

A theological college with such an object and aim cannot be denominational in character, nor is it necessary that either its professors or its students should be actual or would-be ministers or missionaries. It should be a common ground of work for earnest-minded seekers of truth of all denominations, that accept the principle of rational freedom as their guiding spirit, and they ought to find in it the best agency for giving the necessary intellectual and theological training to their ministers and missionaries. There should be absolutely no theological tests required either in the case of the teachers or the students,—the spirit of

spiritual freedom and reverential critical study should give every one a passport into it.

The only question is : Will it be practicable to work a theological institution on such an undenominational basis in India ?—This involves really four questions in detail :—(1) Professors, (2) Students, (3) Funds, (4) Management and control. I will take up each of these separately.

First, with regard to the question of professors, there is one extremely significant fact which I desire particularly to emphasise. We have to remember that the theological college that we are proposing to establish will be not one amongst several such institutions in this country, but it will practically be almost the only one of its kind in India. It is an amazing fact that India is the only country in the world which under the disintegrating and secularizing forces of modern civilization, has not as yet made any serious attempt to fortify her Faith on a sound intellectual basis or mould the religious education of her people in accordance with the spirit of the times. If a theological college is started why should it not be a welcome ground for the presentation of Hinduism and Mahamadanism, Buddhism and Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Sikhism,—in the light of critical, impartial study ? Why should it be difficult to get some of the best and most scholarly men in each denomination to set forth the principles and history of their religion in the best light they can ? Remember in most cases, where there are actually competent, scholarly men to do this, —it is not a mere question of their doing it in connection with the proposed college, or elsewhere,—but it is

a question of their doing it here or not doing it at all. When one considers what an amount of scholarship and study and insight runs to waste in this country, because there is no institution to utilise it properly,—one becomes almost sanguine that there will be no difficulty on the score of getting competent professors, who will be willing to work on undenominational lines. Besides there will be very little risk of friction, because what will be expected from everyone will be positive, constructive exposition of a particular system from his own special point of view.

An institution which will create an opening and make a permanent provision for the authoritative exposition of the great religions, by real masters in the light of the modern spirit,—is a special need of India. In India the work of such an institution will mean not a mere study of systems—but the promotion of mutual understanding between living faiths and living men,—and a fuller appreciation of the essentials and accidents of each religion,—which will gradually lead to a better harmony of social and national life.

For a college with such an ideal, there need be no restriction with regard to the admission of students. Every earnest-minded seeker after truth will be welcome. To secure efficiency in study,—a preliminary intellectual test for admission,—and regularity in connection with all the work imposed—will be quite enough.

The question of funds for and institution of this nature ought, I believe, to cause no anxiety at all. The institution should be free to students of all classes while, I believe, it should be a matter of principle

that all professors, whether employed permanently or for short terms, should receive a compensation for their labour. It should have a permanent local habitation of its own with lecture-rooms, and a library,—where it should be the aim to keep a collection of books, manuscripts, &c., that might attract scholars of comparative religion from all parts of the world. One important department of the college should be the publication department. The creation and dissemination of a sound, solid literature should be as much the object as the direct training of students who attend lectures. All the lectures should be published,—in English and at least in one vernacular of India,—and circulated as widely as possible. All this means some expenditure,—and yet it would be strange indeed if on an earnest appeal funds were not forthcoming for the creation and maintenance of an Institution whereon is staked the entire theological development in the country,—irrespective of sect or denomination.

The Brahmo Somaj Committee appears to me to be the fittest body at least to give the movement a start. As yet the great experiment has to be made. It has to be proved by actual work that the idea is a practicable one.

If we commence work with the men and resources that are immediately available,—but on these liberal lines, and upon this catholic basis, I earnestly hope, we shall not have to wait long before a theological college for India upon undenominational lines, becomes an accomplished fact.

THE AIMS OF THE BRAHMA-VIDYALAYA*

The number of people to whom the opening of the *Brahma-Vidyalyaya* is likely to appeal as an event of any significance must, at the present time, be exceedingly small. And yet the promoters of the institution have felt it to be in keeping with the fitness of things to give it as wide a publicity as can possibly be thrown open to it. Amongst a small circle it has been a thing long dreamt of, long hoped for, oftentimes discussed in friendly gatherings, and thought over in silent meditation, and to them it will be a day of rejoicing past expression when it is at last going to take a definite shape, and stand forth with a distinct vocation

*An address given in the Albert Hall, on July 8, 1907, at a public meeting under the presidency of the Maharaja-Dhiraj of Burdwan, to inaugurate the Brahma-Vidyalyaya—a theological School just opened in Calcutta, under the control of a Council composed as follows :—

His Highness the Maharaja-Dhiraj of Burdwan—*President*.
Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar—*Vice-President*.

Members—Dr. P. K. Ray (Principal), Pundit S. N. Sastri, Babu Ume.h Chandra Dutt (since deceased);—Principal, Heramba Chandra Maitra, Principal Brojendra Nath Seal, Hon'ble Babu Jogenora Chandra Ghosh, Pundit Sitanath Tattwabhusan, Hon'ble Justice N. G. Chaudhary, Mr. R. Venkataratnam Naidu, Prof. Ruchiram Sahni, Mr. Lalsankar Umiyasankar.

Secretary—Mr. Satyendra Nath Tagore.

Joint-Secy.—Prof. Benoyendra Nath Sen.

Asst. Secy.—Babu Hem Chandra Sarkar.

and a localized responsibility, praying earnestly for the blessing of God and the good will of men, and challenging even from the unsympathetic a recognition of its right to existence.

SHORT HISTORY

There was a *Brahma-Vidyalya* opened in 1859, shortly after Keshub Chunder Sen had joined the Brahmo Somaj. It was an institution where Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and Brahmananda Keshub Chunder Sen taught Theology—the New Theology of the day—when Theology meant not a study of dogma, or even scriptural criticism,—but the search of the soul for the Eternal Reason. Only a few of the lectures given by Keshub Chunder Sen have been preserved ; the lectures of the Maharshi were reported by his son, Mr. Satyendra Nath Tagore (Secretary of the present *Brahma-Vidyalya*) and published in the form of a book called the Faith and Doctrine of the Brahmo Religion. (ब्राह्म धर्मोत्तम मत ओ बिश्वास)

One wonders why the institution was not kept up—it might have done so much,—it might have built a rock-foundation for the faith of the Brahmo Somaj, prevented so many vagaries, given a solid basis for the impulses and spiritual experiences wherewith the life of the church was blessed later to stand upon, even slowly revealed the lines along which the whole system of religious belief, worship, ceremonial etc., of the millions of the country was to be reconstructed. But this is no time for regrets !

The idea of having a Theological School for the Brahmo Somaj was next revived when the Brahmo

Somaj Committee was constituted. This Committee, consisting of the representatives of all the sections of the Brahmo Somaj, was formed in 1896, as a result of the visit of the Rev. J. T. Sunderland to India as representative of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. The main object of the Committee was to co-operate with our English and American Unitarian friends in promoting the theistic movement in India and amongst the Articles of Association as proposed by Mr. Sunderland, was the following :—

“The taking of such steps toward the creation in the future as soon as it can be brought about, by the joints efforts of the Brahmo Somajes, the English Unitarians, and the American Unitarians, of a strong and high-grade Theological School in Calcutta—a school manned by professors of such ability and learning as will command respect and attention not only all over India but in Europe and America.”

“In the absence of such a theological School in India, or until it can be created, the sending of one or more young men of ability, each year, to Manchester College, Oxford, England, for theological education.”

Since 1896, the Brahmo Somaj Committee has been sending at certain intervals, to the Manchester College, Oxford, and lately also to the Meadville Theological School in America a number of these scholars who are supposed to receive a training mainly with a view to their being of help in the working of a Theological School in Calcutta.

The necessity of such a theological school has in recent years been forced upon the consideration of the theistic body in India, with greater urgency than ever. It has been discussed by the Brahmo Somaj Committee.

by the promoters of the Society of Theists, by a special representative committee appointed at a public meeting of Brahmos, and it was made the subject of a resolution at the last Theistic Conference, representing theists from all parts of India, which assembled together in Calcutta in December last.

The *Brahma-Vidyalaya* therefore, is ushered into existence with the sympathy of the members, promoters, friends and sympathisers of the Theistic movement all over India, watching over its birth with the keenest interest. Nor is the interest of our friends beyond the seas less watchful or active. It is just a few weeks since a message came from the Rev. F. C. Southworth, President of the Meadville Theological School, in America, which contains the following :—

"In a recent number of the "Indian Messenger" I was much interested to read about the successful establishment of your new theological college. I am delighted indeed to hear of it. This was your dream when you talked with me in Meadville. It is good to learn that it has so soon become a reality."

IDEA AND SCOPE

So writes Mr. Southworth from Meadville, and we have not the slightest doubt that there are many other friends, both in America and in England, whose hearts are at one with us in all those hopes and aspirations that gather round this little theological school that we are opening to-day. And yet, if there is one feeling which more than another fills our hearts at the present moment,—it is this : It is easy perhaps to dream, it is not quite so easy to see that dream

become a reality. But the dream itself is not lost. It is quite as fresh and vivid in the mind as it was when it shone as a bright and beautiful luminary before the enchanted vision of the "Pilgrim" wandering far from home, beyond seas and across continents, sojourning amongst those loving and hospitable friends in Meadville ; or perhaps it would be truer to say that it was the dream itself that had led the poor pilgrim to leave home, and stake everything, and set out in quest of light and guidance for its own fulfilment. It may not be waste of time just to speak one word about that dream itself. We dream of a theological school—a *Brahma-Vidyālaya*,—that would be an *Asrama* of the Rishis of old, harboured in some quite, shaded nook, where Nature breathes forth perpetual inspiration into the soul of man,—not cut off either from the busy and active life of men and the arts and pursuits of modern life, somewhat like that quite picturesque Pennsylvanian town of Meadville itself ; surrounded withal if possible by an intellectual atmosphere such as that of Oxford ; breathing the spirit of intellectual and spiritual freedom, and filled with bright-faced, sound-hearted teachers and students such as one meets with in the Harvard Divinity School of America. We had dream, that for the locality of our *Asrama* it might not be impossible to find even in India, a quite, healthy town,—which might possibly be a University town,—or at least a town with one or more colleges, and one of these might be, if not the Presidency College, at least a college thoroughly equipped and maintained by Government, so that we should have a neighbourhood well-fitted to furnish the necessary

intellectual stimulus, and the materials of culture secular and spiritual. We still dream that it would only be necessary to make the right sort of appeal to the instinct for theological scholarship and spiritual discipline and culture, which lies imbedded in the deepest heart of India, all over the country, and also an appeal to the munificence of those who alone can furnish the material means for the success of such undertakings; and it might not be impossible to get together men and funds that would revive the memories of Nalanda, and establish once more a centre of religious culture—broad, catholic, un-sectarian, open-hearted—opening its doors for the study and appreciation of all scriptures, all teachers, all saints and prophets with a heartiness of welcome whereof India alone (under Asoka, or Siladitya or Akbar) has shown the example in the past, and which in the mysterious arrangements of Providence himself, is to day possible to India alone;—using the raw materials of the world's theological systems as the vesture and organ for a spirit of Faith and worship, broad as Humanity itself;—receiving with cordial hospitality, teachers, pupils and pilgrims from distant lands in the East and the West.

BEGINNINGS

We shall have to be careful, lest any apprehension should arise in the matter, to send word to our American friend to tell him that *this dream* is still far, far indeed, from becoming a reality. Still every beginning, earnestly undertaken, is a reality whereof the full significance is not apparent from the first, and every reality may in the end surpass the utmost

anticipations of a dream. Our beginning has its drawbacks. At the outset of our work, we find with inexpressible sorrow that one or two workers,* in whom were centred our very highest hopes in this matter, have, just when the need of their presence was the greatest, passed behind the veil. Even our available forces are scattered in the most distracting fashion, and we do not always know what can bring them together. We believe there are men in the country, in whom the mine of traditional theological lore is still very deep and varied, and we are anxious to bring their light from under the bushel and make it shine for the whole country,—but we do not know where and how to find them, and also whether they would consent to work in the spirit which to us is essential. We are dependent upon our English and American friends to help us with teachers who will teach the Jewish and Christian scriptures in the light of undogmatic and unconventional scholarship and criticism. An exclusive secular education from childhood upwards, and that of a most partial and imperfect description; in fact almost an absolute unfamiliarity with the higher things of the spirit, such as is to be found perhaps in no other country of the world, has blunted the spiritual instincts and aspirations of the new generations of our students; and it is hard to evoke in them the enthusiasm without which no such institution as we contemplate can flourish. And then last, though not the least, there is the question of funds, People are willing to help, sure enough,

*Particularly the late Professor Mohit Chunder Sen and Babu Umesh Chunder Dutt.

provided the work is rightly done, and they are convinced of the spirit in which it is to be done. But on the other hand, the question arises: How can there be a beginning at all, and that on the right lines, unless the funds are forthcoming?

And so we have been hesitating and hesitating till at last it seems just possible to-day that we can make a beginning. A generous and spontaneous offer of help,* (for which may the blessing of God rest upon the helper!) makes this beginning possible. There are other promises of help which also are deeply encouraging. If genuine and truthful spiritual culture be the deepest need of India, as it was her crown in the past, there can be no doubt that this will call forth her best energies too, and princes and peasants will give liberally of their own, each in their own way, for anything which has that for its end,—provided always that it is genuine and truthful. We have on our Council men who are representatives of the theistic movement all over India; our workers are as yet few and limited, but as a mark of continuity as it were, where there have been so many changes, and so many men and things have passed away, we have for our Secretary, the man, who, just half a century ago, was associated with his venerable father, the Maharshi, in the work of the first *Brahma-Vidyalya*.

SPIRIT AND PRINCIPLES

What is to be our work? And what is the spirit

*His Highness the Maharaja-Dhiraj of Burdwan has out of his own enthusiasm taken the School under his support become its first Patron, and for the present made a grant of Rs. 300 a month for it.

in which this work is to be carried on ? In one word, our spirit is the spirit of perfect spiritual freedom, and our work is to be two-fold, *viz*—(1) The study of Theology in a perfectly unsectarian and undogmatic spirit, and (2) The training of workers who shall make self-consecration to the service of God and man in the above spirit the supreme end of their life. This programme is sure to give rise to a number of queries which I shall proceed to answer as briefly as possible.

First, why waste any time and energy in the study of Theology at all ? Is it not antiquated and effect,—utterly useless in these days,—a hindrance, rather, in the way of scientific progress, of industry and commerce, which alone must be considered as the supreme end of men and nations ? Or again, even recognising a certain value for religion and morality, why make them complicated with theology ?

A number of points may be set forth in answer to this query.

- (1) Consider what is taking place in those countries which are the most advanced in Science, in commerce and industry ? Do they ignore, do they despise Theology ? Consider simply the amount of new theological literature that comes out every year, every month, almost every week, in Germany, in England, in America. Interest in theology is not a hindrance, not a sign of decadence, on the contrary, it is a significant evidence that the highest intelligence of the land is not engrossed with the wants of the body, but is free

the devote itself to the supreme question of the Spirit. Then again consider holy men like Tyndall, and Huxley and Spencer, and almost every distinguished Scientist of the age, have not been indifferent to theology ; on the contrary, they have been busy with these same supreme questions ; only in their case it has been an attempt at re-thinking old thoughts, and renaming old ideas, whereof the creed of a Layman" by F. Harrison, is perhaps the latest example.

- (2) Where is the country, outside India, where education, from childhood upwards, is so exclusively, so relentlessly secular materialistic, utilitarian ; where all sense of Reverence, sense of Beauty, sense of the Sanctity of human life and human relations, is simply smothered and crushed by sheer want of proper stimulation and culture ? We speak of man as the child of God ; but it must be remembered that without culture, this child of God is a mere animal. And this in a country where the whole life of man was portioned out into four periods, and each called an *Asarama*, each consecrated as a religious and spiritual discipline !
- (3) What country, other than India, suffers such an exceptionally rich inheritance, in the shape of Scriptures, and commentaries, religious codes and canons, systems

of philosophy and theology,—simply to run to waste, and rot, for want of a little critical, discriminative treatment? In the West, even countries of the most orthodox and conservative type are not without some power of adaptation and adjustment, and hence in their universities and seminaries, abbeys and cathedrals, Theology is not altogether abandoned as dead. In India, there are temples and *mathas* richly endowed, there are rich communities, Hindu, or Mahammadan, or Jain, or something else, nay even schools and scholars, but how fast disappearing, if not already almost extinct, and only for want of a little power of adaptation !

- (4) In the forth place, as regards the distinction between religion and theology, it is a characteristic thing to be noted that there has never been a religious faith or movement in the world that has not had its theological development. The impulse may have come from the necessity of a purification of faith and doctrine, and elemination of false accretions and vagaries, as in the case of Buddhism, or the fulfilment and deeper self-realisation of faith in the fuller life of ideas evolving on the soil wherein it is planted, as in the case of Christianity and Vaishnavism. The need of pure theistic faith to express

and expand itself into a living theology of its own, from both these points of view, is, at the present day, most imperative. The great teachings and revelations of the age have to be kept unadulterated, by a stern process of purging and purification, while on the other hand our spiritual life cannot find its fullest realisation except in the living assimilation of the great ideas which the age has either inherited or evolved.

I now proceed to the second query about our programme. What, it might be asked, is unsectarian and un-dogmatic theology ? The theology that belongs to a special church or denomination is intelligible, by what is theology on an undenominational basis ?

The full answer to this question must be worked out in actual life ;—for it is the great Theology of the future ; it is Theology as it is yet to be, as it has to shape itself in accordance with the Spirit of the Age, whereof only small beginnings have been made here and there in every part of the world, and to which India also has been making, and will still further have to make her contributions, however humble, but in a spirit of faith and love and from a vantage ground which perhaps is open to no other country in the world.

All that we can say at present is that it is not open to the charge of vagueness or uncertainty, for it represents a very definite *point of view*, an intensely concentrated *spirit of faith*, from which the search of the soul sets out for Eternal Reason, and the question

investigated of the relations between God and man, and man and man. Nothing could be more mistaken than to identify it with a colourless (so-called) natural theology, or on the other hand with a shallow eclecticism which has no faith of its own. Its very characteristic is that it has its origin in Faith and not in speculation; it seeks to be the rational embodiment of revelation, and not merely a collection of philosophisms in the dark. That faith is the faith in an ever-living God, accessible to every human soul; and it believes in the revelation that revelation itself is not confined to any age or section of humanity, but is the perpetual apocalypse of the Infinite to man. It is the theology of this faith, worked out in all its branches, that it is our aspiration to cultivate, and study, and disseminate to the best of our power, under the blessing of God.

This will include a study of Philosophy and Sociology, of Scriptures, their traditions and interpretations, of the history of religious movements, and dogmas, and churches, of the lives of great and good men, of all countries and ages, apart from all sectarian bias, but always with a special view to the peculiar spiritual inheritances and possibilities that Providence may have intended for us, people of India. We study all scriptures and all churches, not that we may adopt any one as ours, or combine them all; but because even thus we shall the more fully realise this new Faith and the new spiritual ideal which is our own, in itself definite and not identified with any that existed in the past, and which is the special revelation of the age.

It is in no sense an exaggeration to say that, India perhaps is the only country where such a faith and such an idea could have dawned in its fullness. I speak only of the faith and the idea ; I am far from claiming that there is as yet any church that has at all come to realising this idea.

What is known as Liberal religion in the West is striving after the same or at least is similar ideal, but it has its limitations which seem to be almost necessary. I was present at the last assemblage of the International Conference of this Liberal Religion at Geneva ; and the one thing in the proceedings that struck me was how the outlook of liberal religion in Europe and America was almost wholly confined to Christianity alone. Consider another instance. Here is this "New Theology" which has been making some stir of late. It has been criticised from various quarters, even snubbed as no Theology at all. Be it so ; it is still admitted to be a very definite *point of view*, at any rate, and it is a point of view to which we so cordially respond. In its repudiation of the infallibility of any written book, of the orthodox doctrine about the fall of man, the juridical interpretation of sin and atonement ; its recognition of the ultimate seat of authority in religion as within each individual soul ; its acceptance of the immanence of God, the divinity of man, eternity of the Logos, universality of incarnation, salvation through love, the spiritual significance of immortality ; it sets forth so unmistakably almost what is our own standpoint. And yet there is a silence that marks its difference from us. If the minister of the City Temple had been living and working in India, or better still,

If he had been born an Indian, he would have added one chapter more to his book, wherein he would have spoken about the revelation of God through *all* the scriptures of the world, and the hopes of humanity through the *harmony and reconciliation of religions*.

We reverence Buddhist and Mahommedan and Christian and other religions and their scriptures, not because we are going to be Christians, or Buddhists or Mahammedans ourselves, but because they are indeed the revelations of God, in their fit times and places ; and we believe it is only the recognition of the working of Providence amongst all races and nations that alone can inspire *a reverence for humanity as humanity*, and make for the realisation of the spiritual Brotherhood of man.

APPEAL

So much about the spirit of our theology, and the spirit of our institution. We earnestly invite all those who are at one with us in this spirit, to give us a helping hand. We appeal, respectfully and lovingly to Christians and Buddhists, Mahammadans and Parsees, Jains and Sikhs, or whatever other denominations our appeal may reach, to help us to have a better understanding of their religions and scriptures, interpreted from the standpoint of rational and spiritual freedom. We should respectfully ask our brethren of the various denominations scattered broad-cast over the country to open centres of their own for carrying out the natural evolution of their faiths and practices in harmony with the spirit of the age. Wherever we get

suitable teachers and instructors, willing to work in this spirit, we shall be happy to open courses of lectures or classes for them which will help in the process of evolving the theology of the future.

Our other object is to train workers who will consecrate their life to the service of God and man—in the spirit of this faith and theology. Most urgently are their services needed amongst the masses. Seldom is the importance of this work realised. It is almost like the teaching of the deaf and the dumb and the blind. To teach an illiterate man to read and to write is perhaps to put a soul into him. To help him to know God and worship him, *for himself*, and not vicariously through a priest, is to make that soul a blessing indeed. It is a simple message that has to be brought to him, a simple truth that has to be taught. But the message has to be brought home, the truth has to be made a reality of life. And there are millions who have to be thus helped. The workers for this purpose must be men of no mean type—must themselves be free from superstition, from selfishness, from spiritual vanity, which perhaps is the worst of all to stand in the way of such work. They must be men in whom faith and devotion have, by training and culture, become a part of their constitution. It shall be the duty of the institution to provide such training and culture. They must also, in our present circumstances, be men who should endeavour to keep their physical needs within stern limits; and in strict subordination to this higher call of life. For those needs it shall be the endeavour of the Institution to provide. A few scholarship and stipends have been already arranged

for, we hope those who may have the impulse to support the Institution on the ground of its principles, will not, in their generosity, forget the importance of this aspect of its work.
